Tough Questions, Difficult Answers

on Srila Prabhupada's Contentious Remarks

KAUNTEYA DAS

a member of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness

Founder-*Ācārya*: His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda

EYE of the STORM

"Whatever you may be, either you are poor man or rich man or black man or white man or woman or man, it doesn't matter. Everyone has right to serve Krishna." (Lecture on SB 1.2.6, London, 27 Aug 1971)

To Srila Bhakti Tirtha Swami Maharaja, an embodiment of inclusivity; and to all the ISKCON devotees who, at any time, felt discriminated against due to their race, gender, or sexual orientation.

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Reviews

Hridayananda das Goswami (Howard J. Resnick, Ph.D.):

In his book . . . Kaunteya Dasa offers what may be the most thorough analysis to date of this delicate, controversial issue. This book will provide those interested in the topic an invaluable resource of information, quotations, and analysis. Hopefully this will foster learned, well-informed discussion of a very important topic. Kaunteya writes as a faithful follower of Prabhupada, who is serving our mission by exploring reasonable, authentic ways to understand and explain Lord Krishna's pure devotee, and the Founder-*Acarya* of our mission, ISKCON.

Anuttama Dasa, GBC member, ISKCON Minister for Communications:

Srila Prabhupada said: "So we have no such conception that 'I am Indian,' 'I am American,' 'I am brahmin' or 'I am *śūdra*,' or 'I am black,' 'I am white.' We all are the

same. We are eternal servant of Kṛṣṇa, or God. That is our position." (Lecture in Nairobi, Kenya, 19 Sept 1971)

Kaunteya das is not one to avoid controversial topics, as we have seen in his book “Did Srila Prabhupada Want Women Diksa Gurus?” The topic of that book—whether women should initiate disciples in ISKCON—has drawn twenty years of study, debate, GBC resolutions, the overturning of resolutions, and talks of withdrawal from ISKCON by some if their opinions on the matter do not become the global standard.

Kaunteya’s new book, "Tough Questions, Difficult Answers," all 600+ pages of it (in large font), boldly takes on a topic that is likely more sensitive—understanding the controversial remarks of Srila Prabhupada, ISKCON’s beloved Founder-*Acarya*.

Kaunteya’s work is grounded on extensive research. Even devotees familiar with the topics he highlights—Prabhupada’s occasional comments about women, Blacks, Native Americans, Jews, Hitler, homosexuality, and more—will find references from Srila Prabhupada that are new, and likely more nuanced, than they previously considered.

Kaunteya carefully weaves through a candid assessment of Prabhupada's difficult, and potentially disturbing, comments. I found myself wincing at several points as he shed light on some of the controversial remarks by Srila Prabhupada (some that were new to me), and as he asked probing, tough questions about those. This book does not gloss over what is uncomfortable.

Adding interest to his study of Prabhupada's teachings, Kaunteya provides a menagerie of references to give context to the questions he raises. Those include Wikipedia, a variety of historical data (including what Prabhupada learned as a student in early 20th century India), sociological and anthropological studies, Biblical references, feminist writers, global studies of corruption rates, the American Psychiatric Society, and other contemporary sources and scholarship.

As Kaunteya repeatedly informs us, the ISKCON society and especially its leaders need to be aware of the published and recorded remarks of Prabhupada and be prepared to analyze, put in context, or perhaps step back from (some) of those controversial remarks. There are efforts to do so, but more needs to be done. Recently, for example, the *ISKCON Communications Journal* (Volume 13)

published three articles by ISKCON thinkers who began to examine, in a transparent way, how a society based on the teachings and example of Srila Prabhupada can best understand all of what he said and did.

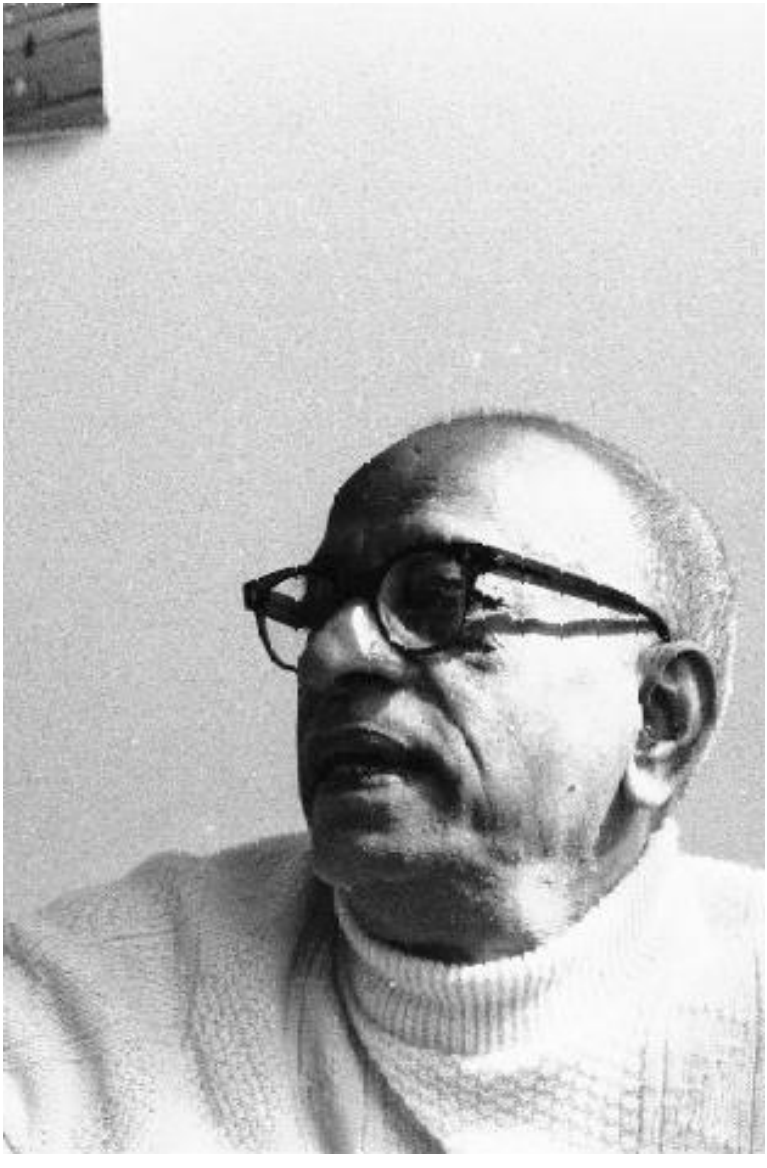
As members of ISKCON, and devoted followers of Srila Prabhupada, we are convinced of Srila Prabhupada's genuine concern, and love, for all people. As noted in an ISKCON Communications statement on the same topic, "Srila Prabhupada actively sought to share the gifts of the Hare Krishna, or *bhakti-yoga*, tradition with all people. At the age of 69, he travelled from India to America, despite great personal hardship . . . Srila Prabhupada invited people of all races [and nations, genders, ethnicities, etc.] to participate in his society and realize their eternal relationship with God. Thousands of people flocked to him in large part because he advocated spiritual awakening, inclusiveness, and respect for all people."

While we may not agree with all of Kaunteya's assessments, we owe him a debt of gratitude for his extensive research, and his willingness to help us think deeply about Srila Prabhupada's controversial remarks. Without doing so, we may find ourselves unable to

understand, explain, and promote, the deeper meaning behind our Founder's words.

Parabhakti Dasa, Communications Director, ISKCON Italy; Vice-Director, ISKCON Communications Europe; Temple President, Villa Vrindavana, Florence:

"In today's world, where it seems sufficient to report a few decontextualized or misunderstood sentences to discredit someone's authenticity and authority, it becomes essential to accurately reconstruct the historical details. Carefully avoiding the slippery ideological position, Kaunteya das tackles the difficult topic of Srila Prabhupada's controversial statements in an objective and transparent way. He leaves the final decision to the readers, providing them with the tools necessary for deeply understanding the personality of the teacher and for correctly interpreting the typical attitudes and assumptions of the historical period."



1. Urgent & Important

"Alright, this video is for anyone who is looking to learn more about Hinduism, and where not to look." The speaker, Michael Mukund Adamson, a student at the *School of Oriental and African Studies* in London, warns his viewers. He shows the cover of Srila Prabhupada's *Bhagavad-gita As It Is* and says, "If you're reading this book, I recommend you put it down. To be clear, the *Bhagavad-gita* is a great source of information on Hinduism, and it's one of the best pieces of literature ever written; but the person who translated it and made the commentary for this particular version is extremely racist, caste-ist, homophobic, sexist." He shows Srila Prabhupada's photo and continues, "For example, at one point he said that black people should be re-enslaved because he thought America's problems came from black people being able to make their own decisions - which is obviously disgusting. But despite this he had and has a huge following." He shows a photo of devotees dancing in

the street, "You might recognize them as Hare Krishnas, who walk around cities and sing *bhajans*. It seems all happy and nice but the history of the founder and of the organization itself, ISKCON, is super problematic - and I have only seen excuses rather than apologies for the disgusting things he said." The 58-second TikTok video ends.

Disciples, grand-disciples, followers and admirers of His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, Founder-*Acarya* of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness, may experience these words as arrows piercing their heart. (They might also wonder why I publish them, thus giving them more publicity.) Some might be tempted to dismiss the above video as irrelevant: "It's just a stupid kid..."; but what about attacks from reputable publications? For instance, the *International Business Times* - which, according to Wikipedia, "is one of the world's largest online news sources, receiving forty million unique visitors each month." - published an article[1] entitled "Swami Prabhupada: Founder Of Hare Krishna Movement, And A Virulent Racist, Anti-Semite."

[1] https://www.ibtimes.com/swami-prabhupada-founder-hare-krishna-movement-virulent-racist-anti-semite-1412102

The painful fact is that allegations against Srila Prabhupada as a racist, sexist and homophobe abound on the internet. Just Google it and you'll see. These accusations force us to think: how do we relate to such attacks, as individuals and as a community? How do we personally process such criticism emotionally and intellectually? What should be our public, official stand as a Society? This book explores these questions, starting by analyzing if there could be any truth, although unpalatable, to such allegations. I consider Srila Prabhupada a divinely empowered being, entrusted by God and His representatives to spread God consciousness all over the world by translating and commenting on the foundational scriptures of Lord Caitanya's movement such as *Bhagavad-gita*, *Srimad-Bhagavatam* and *Sri Caitanya-caritamrita*. Srila Prabhupada was also invested with the spiritual authority and institutional competence to establish a living, global devotional community in the form of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness, and to settle fundamental standards of individual and collective behavior for the spiritual advancement of present and future generations. Although pure in his understanding of *sastra*, while dialoguing on social matters he occasionally referenced sources that were neither absolute nor accurate

(such as his college professors' views on the size of men's and women's brains), therefore some of his comments on certain material issues appear to have been affected by the relative cultural influences he had been exposed to. Also, and perhaps more importantly, his style of expression - often quite forceful and categorical-sounding - may give the impression that he uncompromisingly advocated certain positions; positions that on other occasions he mollified and modified, offering more nuanced viewpoints, or directly contrasting perspectives. For instance: "All the so-called scientists, their only point is how to deny the existence of God." (Morning Walk, Bombay, 18 Nov 1975) "There are many scientists, they believe in God." (Conversation, Stockholm, 10 Sept 1973) We could offer many examples of such diverging affirmations. If we lock ourselves into believing that certain informal proclamations reveal the *true* Srila Prabhupada, we doom our comprehension to remain distorted or partial. On many topics, we can realistically understand Srila Prabhupada's actual message only if we study his words within the context of the totality of his statements. This will be shown in connection with several of his assertions about race, gender, and sexual orientation.

This book is written for two primary audiences:

1. The followers of Srila Prabhupada who may feel disturbed, confused, or disoriented by his so-called "controversial statements."

2. The leaders of ISKCON - global, continental, national or local - who must manage the consequences of such statements - within our movement and within the public arena. As this book is written principally for individuals identifying as followers of Srila Prabhupada, I am not going to explain in detail philosophical, linguistic or historical references ISKCON members should be familiar with. Through this book you will gain an acute awareness of things Srila Prabhupada said and their possible missionary and theological repercussions. This book will propel you to contemplate ideas that at present you may instinctively abhor and reject as heretical. It will also suggest courses of actions that may result challenging and painful. Most unnerving of all for me, reading this book might generate (or worsen) a crisis of faith in the reader. In one sense, this book is not for the faint of heart or for the weak-minded. I wish to treat you, the reader, as an adult. You know the title of the book; you chose to read it; take responsibility. I am promising nothing but an attempt at an honest analysis. In one sense, there is

nothing secret here; all references are openly available on the web - often in multiples sites and languages - but, as far as I know; this is the first attempt to gather and discuss these specific quotations within a single publication. I consider myself a follower of Srila Prabhupada, but the book is not meant as a partisan whitewash. I like to believe you understand the delicate nature of this undertaking, the difficult character of this endeavor, and accordingly will give the subject the careful attention it deserves. As an individual, you can choose to stay and read on or you can go, in either case I wish you well; but as a movement we can't avoid this exploration. It's part of the growing pains of the mission.

I won't hide from the reader the apprehension I feel in attempting this project. I am not too concerned with the extremists (of any persuasion), the bigots and the dogmatists. In fact, I do feel attracted to the idea of enraging them, as their convulsive disapproval provides an indirect but reassuring confirmation of the validity of my work; if *they* are upset with me - as in previous occasions - I must be doing *something* right. My trepidation is different. I am wondering: am I making a huge mistake in attempting to process such extremely delicate issues? Am

I being conceited or offensive (or both) in addressing such volatile themes? Should I have rather opted for a more cautious approach, a wiser hesitation, a self-imposed silence? Maybe. But *somebody* has to talk about these things; and it might as well be me. It is said that "fools rush in where angels fear to tread" - am I the fool of this proverb? Perhaps. Bertrand Russell said, "The whole problem with the world is that fools and fanatics are always so certain of themselves, and wiser people so full of doubts." Am I simply an overconfident, outspoken idiot? You decide. In any case, I invoke your forgiveness for my impudence, and I ask you to tolerate my spiritual shortcomings. What encourages me is the belief that in future, others, more qualified than me, will also address these topics - and they will do it in a better way.

The Issues - Various & Serious

Let me walk you through some of the problems:

- The devotees and the public are becoming more and more aware of statements by Srila Prabhupada that could be considered racist, homophobic or sexist. Due to those statements, in the future large

swathes of the public may dismiss the whole Hare Krishna thing as a despicable cult, a group of obtuse and backward fanatics.

- ISKCON devotees might experience a growing cognitive dissonance between their practice of worshiping the Founder-*Acarya* as an infallible representative of God and a gnawing sense of discomfort with some of his views. This can cause loss of enthusiasm, inner agony, ongoing psychological torture, existential dilemmas and, in some cases, the withdrawal from devotional service and from spiritual practice. (It has already happened.) Others will continue their spiritual practices but feel tormented and unsettled, often unable to express their pain in fear of being denounced as disloyal or being ostracized as sacrilegious.
- Large groups such as Blacks, Jews or the LGBTQ community may start seeing the International Society for Krishna Consciousness as inherently antagonistic.
- Once certain derogatory labels stick to ISKCON (racist, sexist, homophobic, etc.), it may take generations - and painful, drastic steps - to shake

them off, even partially. (The longer we wait to do something about it, the harder it might get to be successful.)

- Governmental and other agencies might blacklist ISKCON as an undesirable, misguided, misleading, retrograde organization, dangerous to society due to promoting ideas that clash with their vision of human dignity and egalitarianism. Besides the immense loss of reputation and opportunities, this might involve legal repercussions, public condemnation, and other official restrictions. For instance, ISKCON might even be banned as an antisocial movement. The same celebrities and prominent politicians who now accept being seen at our functions might never show up again.
- In some case the hostility might snowball into violent, physical attacks on ISKCON members and centers.

You may wonder: "What are the solutions?" For now, I can tell you that there are no easy fixes. As a start, I wish to explore the allegations in depth. Is there any substance to the accusations? I am not interested in trying to delegitimize the detractors' disapproval just by branding

them as *envious* or *demoniac*. I am not interested in name-calling or labelling. I won't try to attack their character or sincerity of purpose. Their philosophical and historical grasp may be limited, but their struggling with certain statements deserves acknowledgement and serious examination. And let's remember that people troubled by things Srila Prabhupada said include thousands of ISKCON members. I respect their discomfort. The mind is like a parachute; it only works when it's open. We shouldn't summarily dismiss their concerns as unfounded or malicious; that would be the surest way to cultural isolation and social ghettoization. Some statements by the Founder-*Acarya* are misinterpreted or misrepresented because of being taken out of context or filtered through questionable ideologies. Other affirmations are indeed inaccurate and ISKCON should distance itself from them. The problem is that the public at large doesn't have the interest or the patience to delve into the context of a statement or to see the minor imperfections for what they are, spots on the moon. Modern audiences are often lightning-quick to summarily dismiss, discard and demonize anyone even remotely suspected of harboring racist, homophobic or sexist viewpoints. People can be very rash and intolerant in their disapproval. And so we

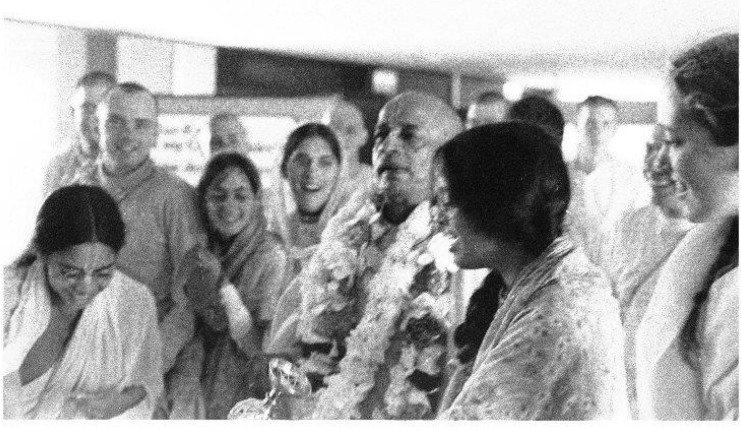
find ourselves - as ISKCON members and broadcasters of Krishna's message - in the position of promoting Srila Prabhupada's glories to the world, with the danger that a few aggravating expressions could neutralize our efforts. There is a factual risk that our Founder-*Acarya* could be relegated, in the mind of millions, to the role of a cultural villain: anti-Blacks, anti-gays, and anti-women. And this is already happening. What an awkward, paradoxical and ironical predicament! Srila Prabhupada was the real well-wisher of all humanity; the best friend of everyone - including all Blacks, gays and women. He may have been the person who actually did most for them, for their real upliftment and permanent happiness.

Who Is Srila Prabhupada?

The obvious, easiest and easily demonstrable answer is that he is the Founder-*Acarya* of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness and the author of dozens of volumes of translations and commentaries on various prominent *sastras.* I believe - and I am not alone - that he is an extremely empowered representative and messenger of the Supreme Personality of Godhead, Sri Krishna. I believe his extraordinary accomplishments in propagating

Krishna consciousness throughout the world demonstrate that he is and will remain a major star within the firmament of Gaudiya-vaisnavism. (Or should I say a moon?) I believe that he is the *senapati-bhakta*, the devotional "commander-in-chief" prophesized in the sixteenth century by Locana Dasa Thakura in the words attributed to Lord Caitanya: “Taking the sharp sword of the congregational chanting, I will root out and destroy the demoniac mentality in the hearts of all the conditioned souls. If some sinful people escape and giving up religious principles go to far off countries, then my commander-in-chief devotee will come at that time to give them Krishna consciousness.” (*Caitanya-mangala*, *Sutra-khanda*, song 12, texts 564-565) I believe Srila Prabhupada played a prominent role in the grand scheme of re-spiritualization of the world executed over millennia by divine and divinely inspired personalities such as, chronologically, Srila Vyasadeva, Lord Buddhadeva, Sripada Sankaracarya, Sripada Ramanujacarya, Madhvacarya, Lord Caitanyaa Mahaprabhu, Srila Rupa Goswami, Srila Jiva Goswami, Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakura and Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura. In the *Srimad-Bhagavatam*, in the four verses describing Srila Vyasadeva's trance (SB 1.7.4-7), the whole philosophy is presented in a nutshell. *Bhakti-yoga*

is declared as the true and only permanent solution to all the sufferings experienced by conditioned souls; but, unfortunately, people do not know about it (*lokasyājānato*); therefore Vyasadeva compiled the *Bhagavatam*, producing an extensive, compelling and exquisitely composed presentation of Krishna and devotional service. Srila Prabhupada fulfilled the need to inform the countries outside of India by translating and commenting the *Bhagavatam* in English, by bringing it to the West, by printing and distributing it, and by organizing translations in many languages. Not only that, he also promoted and demonstrated the application of the *Bhagavatam* principles by recruiting and initiating thousands of Vaisnavas from all sorts of backgrounds, by



opening temples, installing Deities, introducing festivals, establishing farms, opening schools and launching other initiatives such as scientific outreach and free food distribution - all in twelve years. Both devotees and academics recognize the extraordinary nature of such accomplishments. I have no doubt that he was a lover of God; a person God personally invested with the power to spread His holy names, His glories and His mission on a planetary scale.

Perfect Doesn't Mean Infallible

I believe Srila Prabhupada's spiritual achievements and his personal holy behavior are indisputable. What may be more challenging is comprehending his human dimension. He was not his body. He was an eternal spiritual person temporarily inhabiting a material physical and psychic body. In the years he walked the Earth - 1896-1977 - he felt the heat of the summer, the cold of winter, the afflictions of illness and the discomforts of old age. Someone might imagine and theorize that, no, he wasn't touched by physical and psychological circumstances, by what happened to his body and mind; but Srila Prabhupada never said that. For instance, during his first

winter in New York he wrote: "I am taking my meals once only . . . In the evening I take some milk and fruit and nowadays the night being very long, I feel sometimes for this night starvation . . . I do not feel much cold now but it is learnt that it will increase more and more and before that I wish to leave this place." (Letter to Sally 13 Nov 1965) He often mentioned about his physical troubles, in letters such as this one: "I was sick for four or five days; now I am a little better but the disease is prolonging in a different way. I cannot sleep at night more than 2 hours and during the day sometimes I am feeling some dizziness." (Letter to Kirtanananda, 22 Aug 1971) or in expressions like this: "I was very sick after heart stroke . . . The heart was so weak." (Conversation, Los Angeles, 8 June 1976) Or this: "I was suffering so much from dental pain." (Morning Walk, Bombay, 23 Dec 1975) As far as mental distress, he wrote, for example: "Regarding the closing of the temples . . . It is disastrous . . . I am very disappointed that you have done this." (Letter Hansadutta, 29 Sept 1974) Or he said: "If somebody dozes [during the lecture], it gives me too much pain . . . It disturbs me, too much disturbs me." (Lecture on SB 6.3.18-19, Gorakhpur, 12 Feb 1971) Or: "You have written that you will soon be leaving Hamburg and this news

has caused me some distress." (Letter to Sivananda, 17 Dec 1968) Some people may interpret these accounts as if Srila Prabhupada was merely *imitating* the human condition and was only *simulating* bodily and mental discomfort - as if in a theatrical performance. Some think he was "transcendental" to physical sufferings in the sense of not perceiving them at all. I believe such ideas are pious but fictional notions. He was indeed *transcendental* in the sense that this bodily discomfort didn't affect his Krishna consciousness and his determination to serve; but not in the sense that he didn't feel any pain. These, nonetheless, are secondary considerations. What's more relevant to our discussion is if and to what extent his psychic body was affected by the culture surrounding him and by the information (especially if inaccurate) that he received. Of course, the main sources of his knowledge were sacred texts such as the *Gita* and the *Bhagavatam*, reservoirs of super-human, infallible revelations about Reality; valid descriptions of both material and spiritual dimensions. Srila Prabhupada was also the receiver and representative of the realizations of the many liberated souls in the *parampara*, the chain of spiritual teachers - besides having his own mystical insights. No issue there. What remains to be defined: was he *infallible* in the literal sense of never

making a mistake or of never incorporating imperfect data in his outlook? It seems that we need a "theology of embodiment," a coherent philosophical explanation of how liberated, empowered personalities such as Srila Prabhupada, are affected by their inhabiting prakritic (material) physical and psychic tabernacles. Such theology, I believe, would have to preserve the respect for such great souls as perfected beings, revering them as divine emissaries, while detailing how their dwelling in material bodies and minds may impose certain circumstantial limitations. A material body is synonymous with *limitation*; but this doesn't necessarily have to significantly curtail or impact the spiritual stature or effectiveness of great souls. Now, one may legitimately argue that the body of a pure devotee should not be considered material: "The body of Bhīṣmadeva lost its material effects due to being surcharged with spiritual realization, and thus the body was spiritualized as when iron becomes red-hot when in contact with fire. The body of a fully self-realized soul is not, therefore, accepted as material." (SB 1.9.45, purport) Srila Prabhupada often spoke of how to render the body spiritualized: "one must take shelter of a bona fide spiritual master and by his instruction increase one's knowledge in devotional service, become detached from

the material world, and thus become liberated. An advanced devotee, therefore, does not live within the material body but within his spiritual body, just as a dry coconut lives detached from the coconut husk even though within the husk. The pure devotee's body is therefore called *cin-maya-śarīra,* 'spiritualized body.' In other words, a devotee's body is not connected with material activities, and as such, a devotee is always liberated (*brahma-bhūyāya kalpate*), as confirmed in *Bhagavad-gītā* (14.26). Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī also confirms this:

īhā yasya harer dāsye
karmaṇā manasā girā
nikhilāsv apy avasthāsu
jīvan-muktaḥ sa ucyate

'Whatever his condition may be, one who is engaged fully with his body, mind and speech in the service of the Lord is liberated, even within this body.'" (SB 4.22.26, purport) At the same time, although spiritual or spiritualized, the body of the pure devotee doesn't become omnipresent, omniscient, or omnipotent; it still partakes of the limitations of time and space; of partial perception; of being *atma* and not Paramatma. The body still manifests

the properties of matter, but it's considered purified because it's fully engaged in spiritual service: "Even if you are in this . . . material body, if you advance yourself in spiritual consciousness or Kṛṣṇa consciousness, you will be spiritualized. Your body will be spiritualized. You'll be no more be affected by this material contamination." (Lecture on Bg 4.3-6, New York, 13 June 1966) The question remains: can a purified, liberated soul commit mistakes? One may believe that Srila Prabhupada did not and could not make any mistake. For instance, someone wrote: "I don't think that Srila Prabhupada was omniscient, but as a perfect instrument for Lord Krishna, he didn't make mistakes. He was perfectly guided by the Supreme perfect at every moment." To me this appears as a *robotic* conception of Srila Prabhupada, one that depersonalizes him, almost turning him into a mechanized entity micromanaged by Paramatma. Personally, I am more inclined to take Srila Prabhupada's words at face value when he says, for instance: "Kṛṣṇa cannot be mistaken. I am imperfect; I can be mistaken. But Kṛṣṇa cannot be mistaken." (Lecture on Bg 13.3, Paris, 11 Aug 1973) Or when he says: "Every one of us, we commit mistakes. 'To error is human.' That is a fact. Everyone will admit. Yes. Nobody can say that, 'I never committed any

mistake.' Nobody can say. That is not possible." (Arrival Lecture, Honolulu, 6 May 1972) The theme was recurring: "We commit mistake. Every one of us who are sitting in this meeting, nobody can say that 'I have never committed any mistake.' That is not possible. We commit mistake, everyone . . . If you inquire whether I am perfect or my disciples who are preaching this Kṛṣṇa conscious movement, they are perfect, we may be imperfect. We are imperfect. We accept we are imperfect. But we are distributing the perfect knowledge . . . We may be imperfect, but Kṛṣṇa is perfect." (Lecture on Bg 2.9-13, Aukland, 21 Feb 1973) Now, someone may interpret in a different way saying, "No, no, Srila Prabhupada was simply *mimicking* the conditioned souls, and, out of great humility, he was saying that he also made mistakes; but actually he was liberated and therefore beyond the four defects that afflict everyone in this world." Look, I don't have the final word and you, the reader, can subscribe to whatever idea you want. Whatever you wish to believe, Krishna can strengthen that conviction into something unmovable. He says in the *Gita* (7.21):

yo yo yāṁ yāṁ tanuṁ bhaktaḥ
śraddhayārcitum icchati

tasya tasyācalāṁ śraddhāṁ
tām eva vidadhāmy aham

Regardless of the type of faith one desires to develop, Krishna, in the heart, can give to that person a trust that is unwavering (*acalām*). And so I am not going to try too hard to change opinions. Let's try for something we probably can all agree: Srila Prabhupada wasn't God, the omnipotent and omnipresent Supreme Being. He was a servant of God, and as such he wasn't omniscient. He was clear about it:

Prabhupāda: *Ācārya* is explained, *bhakti-saṁsanat* (Cc, *Adi-lila* 1.13). One who's preaching the cult of devotional service, he's *ācārya* . . .

Jayādvaita: Sometimes the *ācārya* may seem to forget something or not to know something, so from our point of view, if someone has forgotten, that is...

Prabhupāda: No, no, no. Then...

Jayādvaita: an imperfection.

Prabhupāda: That is not the... Then you do not understand. *Ācārya* is not God, omniscient. He is servant of God. His business is to preach *bhakti* cult. That is *ācārya*.

Jayādvaita: And that is the perfection.

Prabhupāda: That is the perfection. Hare Kṛṣṇa.

Jayādvaita: So we have a misunderstanding about what perfection is?

Prabhupāda: Yes. Perfection is here, how he is preaching *bhakti* cult. That's all.

(Morning Walk, Mayapur, 8 April 1975)

So, "*ācārya* is not God, omniscient"; he may therefore receive some imprecise information but not recognize it as mistaken. That doesn't affect his spiritual status as pure representative of God. The *ācārya*'s greatness is not diminished because of his having occasionally assimilated misinformation on certain material phenomena. These are marginal and infrequent occurrences, which don't affect the truthfulness or correctness of his teachings of the *sastra*. This book attempts to explore questions such as: where did Srila Prabhupada's apparently debatable views come from? In other words, was there a cultural and environmental genesis to these opinions? How can devotees whose faith had been disturbed cope with their doubts? What official stand should ISKCON take on questionable statements on mundane subjects by the

Founder-*Acarya*? Why Krishna allowed such statements to be conceived, spoken and even widely publicized? Some of the answers might perturb some of the readers, but I believe that, in the long run, it's better for the movement to experience some temporary discomfort by facing facts, than numbing ourselves by taking shelter in dogmatic theories and ignoring the tsunami of criticisms crashing upon ISKCON. If someone has better answers and better solutions, I remain open to hear them. As a simple step in the way forward (one, I believe, that would please Srila Prabhupada), ISKCON should distance itself from inaccurate or unnecessarily inflammatory statements. We do not have to subscribe to and strenuously defend every single word that came from Srila Prabhupada's mouth. But someone might argue: "No, no, it is said in the *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad* 6.23:

yasya deve parā bhaktir
yathā deve tathā gurau
tasyaite kathitā hy arthāḥ
prakāśante mahātmanaḥ

'Only unto those great souls who simultaneously have implicit faith in both the Lord and the spiritual master are

all the imports of Vedic knowledge automatically revealed.' Therefore we should have implicit faith that whatever Srila Prabhupada ever said is perfect! Otherwise, we would be offending him." Well, that's one way of interpreting the *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad* verse... but, I believe, a more congruent way is to consider bona fide gurus as transparent via medias when they directly repeat the contents of the Vedic literature and the teachings of the *sampradaya*; not necessarily when they express a personal, relative opinion on something mundane or when they are repeating something they heard from imperfect sources. Srila Prabhupada, commenting on this verse, says: "firm faith in God and similar faith in God's representative . . . Spiritual master means a perfect devotee of God." (Lecture on Bg 10.1-3, New York, 30 Dec 1966) So, when the guru is representing (*re-presenting*) the teachings of God we should accept his or her words with the same faith as if God Himself was speaking. Taking the guru as a "perfect devotee" doesn't mean considering him or her literally infallible; "Kṛṣṇa cannot be mistaken. I am imperfect; I can be mistaken. But Kṛṣṇa cannot be mistaken." (Lecture on Bg 13.3, Paris, 11 Aug 1973) Srila Prabhupada explains that there are three parameters for judging the veracity and reliability of an assertion: "One

should accept a thing as genuine by studying the words of saintly people, the spiritual master and the *śāstra*. The actual center is the *śāstra*, the revealed scripture." (Cc, *Madhya-lila*, 20.352, purport) When gurus talk of things not specifically mentioned in the *śāstras* we may take those views as personal assessments, honest (but potentially mistaken) attempts at clarifying facts and events. Unless backed up by sastric references, we cannot grant to those opinions the same authority of scriptural truths. Non-scriptural views can be taken as subjective. Srila Prabhupada said: "I may be imperfect - I am imperfect, actually I am imperfect - but I am carrying the message, Kṛṣṇa. Kṛṣṇa says: 'I am the Supreme Personality of Godhead'; we say: 'Kṛṣṇa is the Supreme Personality of Godhead.' Kṛṣṇa says that, 'You surrender unto Me'; we say, 'Just surrender unto Kṛṣṇa.' So therefore, because there is no difference between Kṛṣṇa's statement and my statement, therefore our knowledge is perfect. Personally I may not be perfect, but because we are carrying the message of Kṛṣṇa and presenting as it is, therefore it is perfect." (Lecture on SB 1.2.10, Bombay, 28 Dec 1972) Our idea of Srila Prabhupada's perfection shouldn't turn mythological. He was perfect because he was presenting, with pure motivation, the perfect words of the supremely

perfect person, Sri Krishna; and because he was following those perfect teachings in his life. "I am an imperfect person. I cannot give you any knowledge. I cannot manufacture any knowledge. If I do that, then I shall deceive you. I can simply present before you the original knowledge. I can explain it in an understandable way, but not deviating from the original text." (Lecture on Bg 2.12, New York, 9 March 1966) So, when Srila Prabhupada is presenting the "original text" we should take his words as perfect; when he is retelling something he heard from, say, his Christian professors at the Scottish Church College, we need to be cautious, and seek verification.

Publishing Everything? A Colossal Lack of Judgement

I believe the decision to publish everything Srila Prabhupada ever said was a big mistake. The policy of openly circulating every private conversation and every personal letter, without filter, appears as a monumental lack of judgement. Certain private exchanges were private for a reason, and should have remained private and confidential, accessible only to selected researchers. I

remember seeing once my spiritual master, Jayapataka Maharaja, being upset about the public dissemination of certain things Srila Prabhupada said about an Indian politician. Maharaja said that if that quote would fall into the hands of an angry mob, the lives of devotees would be at risk; they could be lynched. *Certain things were never meant to be broadcasted*. Whoever made that choice must have done it in good faith, but they might have done a huge disservice to Srila Prabhupada. In fact, Srila Prabhupada had warned against publishing private exchanges in writing - especially when sensitive: "Regarding publication of BTG No. 29 . . . So far as 'Heroine Govinda Dasi' is concerned, if she has stated directly [name withheld[2]] as nonsense and rascal, that should not be indulged in. We cannot attack anyone directly in writing. There is a proverb in Sanskrit that you can speak something one thousand times, but don't give it in writing. Similarly, we may use some strong words against all this nonsense, but if we write it in black and white, that will not be good. So instead of naming these

[2] The name of the person was there, I removed it in keeping with the spirit of this section. This quote is another example of a statement that could endanger devotees, if it gets into the wrong hands.

rascals directly, you change the word to 'mental speculators.'" (Letter to Brahmananda, 30 Aug 1969)

I believe the choice of putting everything out there was done sincerely and with no ill motive, but it does appear as the blunder of neophytes. But whatever is done is done and whatever is not done is not done. There is no point of wallowing in resentment or regret. As I will elaborate later, I believe there must have been a divine plan behind what appears as appalling imprudence. Nothing happens by chance. In this connection, I have a great debt of gratitude toward all the devotees who patiently, silently and "anonymously" transcribed Srila Prabhupada's lectures, letters and conversations and made them available in electronic form. As true twentieth and twenty-first century amanuenses, they toiled for decades to make the words emanating from the lotus mouth of the Founder-*Acarya* available to all of us. I don't know their names, but I am personally obliged to all of them for their steady and diligent work. (And I know that most of them have nothing to do with the decision of openly publishing everything.) Practically every day I benefit from their efforts. A big THANK YOU from my heart to all of them. Other praiseworthy devotees are translating lectures,

letters and conversations into a number of languages; but now it would be the time to stop indiscriminate circulation, at least in those languages! Someone, for each language, should apply some intelligence and determine what's not for public consumption.

As far as past circulations, it almost looks as if Lord Krishna allowed (or arranged) to have Srila Prabhupada's human side also broadcasted. Of course, Srila Prabhupada's personal letters and conversations reveal his integrity. He was the same either in public or in private; a fully Krishna conscious person, totally absorbed in thinking and talking through the scriptures. Nonetheless, some of his remarks (which, to be fair, often were made also in public) revealed that some of the notions he had imbibed weren't accurate (such as Hitler having the atomic bomb). Such incorrect data apparently affected his attitude about certain mundane subjects; and some of those views (derived from exposure to imperfect sources) happen to trigger great uproar in contemporary audiences. As a result, Srila Prabhupada is being publicly defamed, and his efforts to uplift humanity are in jeopardy.

How Is ISKCON Doing in Addressing the Criticism?

I believe ISKCON's approach and public stand has been, with rare positive exceptions, on one hand timid, negligent and indecisive, or, on the other hand, fanatical, dogmatic and fundamentalistic. I see a lot of emotion being expressed. I see some pedestrian cut-and-paste. And, as per this writing, I see an absence of a comprehensive official stand. Paralyzing fear, intellectual laziness, nonchalant neglect and mindless bigotry appear to be the prominent postures. As per today, my sense is that ISKCON, with nervous silence on one side, and with blind dogmatism on the other, is failing as a spiritual society to offer authoritative guidance to its communities and reliable answers to the world at large. I don't envy ISKCON's leaders; it must be stressful - as individuals and as officers - to witness mounting evidence that some of the Founder-*Acarya*'s statements are, indeed, troublesome. One can be torn apart by the cognitive dissonance between the wish to see Srila Prabhupada as infallible and the realization that he expressed embarrassing notions. I have been participating in dialogues about Srila

Prabhupadas's so-called "controversial statements" that involved some of the most serious, learned and experienced ISKCON leaders. With some noteworthy exceptions, I am not impressed. In some devotees I perceive some sort of internal wall, invisible but palpable, blocking the discussion from reaching unpalatable but inescapable conclusions. Frankly, some of these leaders appear too old, too tired, and too accustomed to the status quo to be able to muster the moral and intellectual strength to carry the discussion to its logical ends and then courageously act accordingly.

How Serious Is the Problem? How Deep & Wide?

The first step in solving a problem is acknowledging its existence. Sensitive, controversial or objectionable statements are not limited to private conversations or intimate morning walks. Incendiary assertions also abound in published books, already translated in dozens of languages. For instance, I have heard that some devotees in New York tell people who just purchased the *Bhagavad-gita As It Is* to skip the first chapter. The pretext being that

"It's full of Sanskrit names; the philosophy really starts in the second chapter." But the real reason is that they want to prevent the beginners from reading the purport of chapter 1, text 40: "As children are very prone to be misled, women are similarly very prone to degradation. Therefore, both children and women require protection by the elder members of the family . . . According to Cāṇakya Paṇḍita, women are generally not very intelligent and therefore not trustworthy." For some, reading this would be the last nail in the coffin of their interest in Krishna consciousness; the death knell of their attraction to ISKCON. If you are an ISKCON devotee, you might have read the words of that purport many times. You might have been implicitly accepting those words as factual, with no second thought; or you might have found them a bit hard to digest - but then you have grown a callus about them and are not bothered anymore. In either case you might not realize the devastating power those words may have on the mind of the average contemporary reader: "Women compared to children?! That's a horribly sexist idea! 'Not very intelligent'?! This sounds like medieval drivel! What about the millions of women doctors, scientists, lawyers, judges, writers, professors, movie directors or CEOs?! What about the millions of moronic men?! Women are 'not

trustworthy'? What about women who run entire countries as heads of government and get reelected because they do a sterling job and gain the trust of the voters?! What about the multitudes of responsible, reliable professional women or even the countless hardworking and dependable housewives?! IT'S JUST NOT TRUE THAT WOMEN AREN'T TRUSTWORTHY! And, by the way, who the heck is this Cāṇakya Paṇḍita guy anyway and why should I listen to his nonsense?! Who wrote this commentary?! Why should I continue to read this rabidly sexist book?! How could I ever consider joining a group promoting such ideas?!" (And I purposefully avoided the obscenities that could pepper such an outburst...)

For ISKCON devotees is natural to feel flustered and unsettled hearing such things. For decades we have been worshipping these books as the highest sacred expression of spiritual knowledge. We have been indoctrinated to consider them the apex of transcendent, divinely inspired literature. It can be disconcerting and discombobulating to realize that they contain passages that can repel and infuriate readers. We should ask ourselves: are those sentences truly essential to the philosophy, to the overall message of the *Gita* or the *Bhagavatam*? Is it necessary to

compare women to children or saying that women are not trustworthy? If such sentences can generate seriously counterproductive consequences, should they be kept in the "law books for the next ten-thousand years"? If those words enrage and repulse millions of readers, what's the benefit of insisting that people read them? Wouldn't it be a pointless, masochistic policy? Wouldn't it be like shooting ourselves in the foot? Would Srila Prabhupada be pleased seeing potential devotees turned away *by his own words*, words spoken sincerely, but words that are nauseating to contemporary readers? Would Srila Prabhupada be happy in seeing his followers doggedly pushing a product that might have outlived its shelf life? These questions cannot be just swept under the carpet. They cannot be ignored. They cannot be answered by pious platitudes, by ad hominem counterattacks, or by sticking our head in the sand, hoping that the vilification will go away. Condemnation and disparagement are not going away. In fact, they may intensify and amplify in the future. Public disapproval may increasingly haunt ISKCON. Inactivity is not an option.

Learning from Govinda's Wisdom

The *Sri Caitanya-caritamrita, Antya-lila* chapter ten, describes that one day, in Jagannatha Puri, after a tumultuous *kīrtana*, Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu took *prasādam* with the devotees and then went back to His place to rest. What happened next is very instructive for us, who are facing the delicate predicament of having to distance ourselves, *as a service to Srila Prabhupada,* from certain things he said. "Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu lay down at the door of the Gambhīrā, and Govinda came there to

massage His legs . . . This time when the Lord lay down, He occupied the entire doorway. Govinda could not enter the room, and therefore he made the following request. Govinda said, 'Kindly turn on one side. Let me pass to enter the room.' Govinda made

his request again and again, but the Lord replied, 'I cannot move My body.' Govinda repeatedly requested, 'I want to massage Your legs.' Then Govinda spread the Lord's wrapper over His body and in this way entered the room by crossing over the Lord. Govinda massaged the Lord's legs as usual. He pressed the Lord's waist and back very softly, and thus all the Lord's fatigue went away. As Govinda stroked His body, the Lord slept very nicely for about forty-five minutes, and then His sleep broke. When Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu saw Govinda sitting by His side, He was somewhat angry. 'Why have you been sitting here for so long today?' the Lord asked. 'Why didn't you go to take your meal after I fell asleep?' Govinda replied, 'You were lying down, blocking the door, and there was no way to go.' The Lord asked, 'How did you enter the room? Why didn't you go out to take your lunch in the same way?' Govinda mentally replied, 'My duty is to serve, even if I have to commit offenses or go to hell. I would not mind committing hundreds and thousands of offenses for the service of the Lord, but I greatly fear committing even a glimpse of an offense for my own self.' Thinking in this way, Govinda kept silent. He did not reply to the Lord's inquiry . . . These are some of the finer points of etiquette in devotional service. Only one who has received the

mercy of Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu can understand these principles." (Cc, *Antya-lila*, 82, 85-97 & 100)

Devotees face a conundrum when two principles can't be simultaneously fulfilled. In this case, the duty to massage Lord Caitanya and the etiquette of not stepping over His body. Govinda could only fulfill one and not the other. In a letter, after narrating this story, Srila Prabhupada elaborates: "The idea is for service of the superior sometimes such violation appears to be in the scene. Ramanujacarya violated the order of the Spiritual Master to advance the cause of the Spiritual Master. The Spiritual Master's mission was to deliver fallen souls, therefore Ramanujacarya considered that if the mantra was so powerful to deliver the persons, why not deliver it to everyone as soon as possible. That was a little tactic to advance the cause of the Spiritual Master. So everything has to be judged by the motive, and as the motive of such apparent violation was very good, Ramanuja's Spiritual Master embraced him. This is not actually violating the order of the Spiritual Master. But such actions are very rarely to be done." (Letter to Satsvarupa, 14 Nov 1968) In our case, the conventional etiquette may appear to dictate that we honor Srila Prabhupada by maintaining and

publishing his books - his speeches, etc. - as he presented them, reproducing his words verbatim. That, I believe, would be a superficial, lazy and self-indulgent conclusion, an immature assumption. More than by our wish for literal fidelity we should be guided by Srila Prabhupada's pleasure. What would please him the most? A parroting approach or whatever it takes to preserve and propagate his mission? In my mind I have no doubt. Srila Prabhupada would wish his followers to do whatever it takes to facilitate the spreading of Krishna consciousness. He wouldn't be thrilled by our acting as superstitious bigots. Govinda had to consider what would please Lord Caitanya the most; if sticking to the etiquette of not crossing over Him, or if to cross over Him to offer some concrete service? Similarly, we need to ask ourselves: "Would Srila Prabhupada be more satisfied if we keep broadcasting all he said about Blacks, gays and women - knowing that it will be devastating for his reputation and for his movement - or that we minimize the negative impact of his statements by revising them or by distancing ISKCON from them? To me, the answer is obvious.

During a morning walk in Mayapur, Srila Prabhupada retold the story of Govinda's massage. Srila Prabhupada

explains how his own attitude had been similar to Govinda's mood: "[paraphrasing Govinda's words:] 'For You [Lord Caitanya], I can do anything. For Your service. But for my sense gratification, I cannot do that' . . . in the Western countries I had to sometimes do something which I should not have done. But I've done it to bring so many souls to Kṛṣṇa." (Morning Walk, Mayapur, 9 March 1974) I suggest that, following in Srila Prabhupada's footsteps, we should ask ourselves: "What would bring more souls to Krishna? Keep repeating and publishing what makes people cringe and run away? Or do *whatever it takes* to help people come to Krishna?" For me, it's crystal clear what would please Srila Prabhupada the most. I believe we should internally clutch his lotus feet and pray for his understanding and forgiveness, and then, on the world stage, we should do the needful, distancing ourselves from whatever keeps people away. (Statements about Blacks, gays and the place of women are generally details anyway.) Distancing ourselves would mean publicly declaring that ISKCON doesn't identify with or necessarily support *everything* Srila Prabhupada ever said or wrote. It would also mean condemning literalistic, oversimplified interpretations and immature applications. This might *appear* to go against etiquette

and proper protocol, but let's consider that during the same morning walk cited above, Srila Prabhupada's also said: "One gentleman . . . He gave me some place. I was cooking. And in the refrigerator, I saw there was meat. (laughs) So I asked: 'What is this?' He said: 'It is for cats. I don't take meat.' 'All right. (laughter) I'll do.' So of course, I stayed there for three, four days. And if I cry, 'Oh, I have violated my rules and regulation...' Rules and regulation can be violated when there is urgent necessity of service, not whimsically or for one's sense gratification." I believe we are facing an "urgent necessity of service" in connection with clarifying ISKCON's stand vis-a-vis certain statements. Urgent and important.

2. Racism in Srila Prabhupada's Teachings?

Racism Defined & Redefined

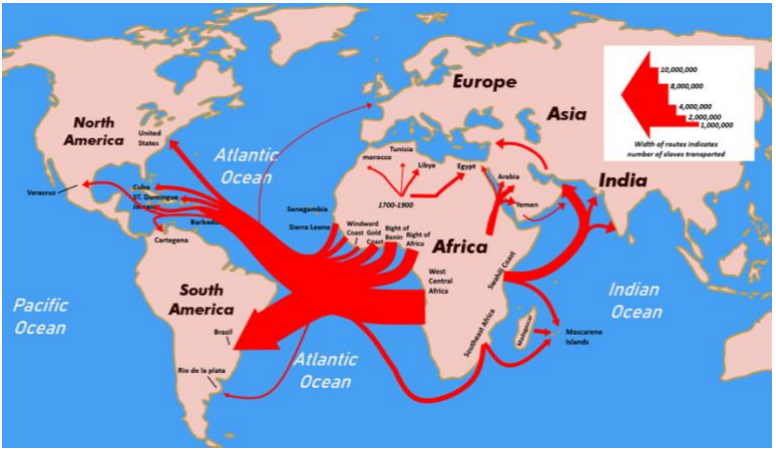
Often people speak certain words without grasping their meaning; what to speak of knowing their history. Busy as they are, they use emotionally and politically charged expressions they hear or read in the media (often social media, an inferior *race* of communication). *Racism* features among the words with the greatest gap between real meaning and common usage. We will spend some time on the definition of *race* and *racism*, as before we even attempt to determine if something is racist or not, we need to know what we are talking about. So, kindly bear with me. Racism possesses a long, convoluted history - for instance, we encounter apparently racist remarks in Aristotle (4th century BC), who asserted that non-Greeks are more prone to the burden of slavery than Greeks. But let's start from the primary, obvious root: *race*. Where such

word come from? According to Wikipedia: "The origin of the root word 'race' is not clear" and "there is no such agreement on how it generally came into Latin-based languages." Regardless of its origin, through recent centuries the concept of *race* has been undergoing radical linguistic and conceptual mutations. The *Online Etymological Dictionary* describes: "Original senses in English included . . . 'group of people with common occupation' (c. 1500)." In the 1560s it indicated "people descended from a common ancestor." By 1774 *race* started denoting "an ethnical stock, one of the great divisions of mankind having in common certain physical peculiarities" - such as facial features, skin color and hair texture. Nonetheless, as the *Oxford English Dictionary* points out, even among anthropologists there has never been an accepted classification of such characteristics.

The age of European colonialism played a major role in consolidating the idea that race should be defined by complexion and other physical parameters. *Wikipedia* explains: "The rise of the Atlantic slave trade . . . created a further incentive to categorize human groups in order to justify the subordination of African slaves."[3] Slave-trading

[3] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Race_(human_categorization)

nations needed some intellectual justification to buy and sell human beings as chattel. But Europeans weren't alone in rationalizing racism. For instance, although the Qur'an expresses no racial prejudice, ethnocentric attitudes developed also among the Arabs, due to various reasons: their widespread military conquests; their trans-Saharan and Indian Ocean slave trade; the influence of Aristotelian ideas on slavery (which some Muslim theorists repurposed from "non-Greeks" to the Turkic people and the Bantu populations of Africa). The slave trade was a big, enticing pie and many people didn't hesitate to stick their fingers in it. Indians weren't above making money by selling human beings. Gujarati merchants, for instance, traded African slaves as well as goods such as ivory and tortoise



shells. They participated in the slavery business at Nairobi, Mombasa, Zanzibar and in the South African region. For some the need for rational validation was stronger than for others. The Europeans' formal Christian ethics demanded an intellectual excuse for the inexcusable; an ethical camouflage to defend the morally indefensible. "Europeans began to sort themselves and others into groups based on physical appearance," Wikipedia continues, "and to attribute to individuals belonging to these groups behaviors and capacities which were claimed to be deeply ingrained. A set of folk beliefs took hold that

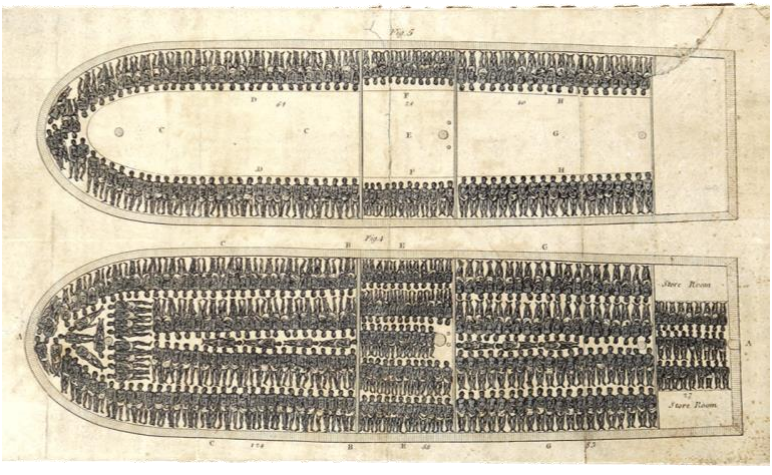


Diagram of a slave ship, 1791. The trip lasted from a few weeks to several months. The victims usually couldn't sit up because of the low ceiling. Due to the overcrowded, unsanitary conditions, up to 25% of all the enslaved Africans bound for the Americas died during the voyage.

linked inherited physical differences between groups to inherited intellectual, behavioral and moral qualities . . . In the 18th century the differences among human groups became a focus of scientific investigation." Academics attempted to classify human beings according to stable sub-divisions, but all such efforts failed to produce an enduring theory, crashing against unfathomable complexity and persistent morphological fluidity. In 1775, for instance, in his treatise *The Natural Varieties of Mankind*, German anthropologist Johann Friedrich Blumenbach proposed five major divisions. Nonetheless, observing the graded transition of appearances between groups, he had to admit that "one variety of mankind does so sensibly pass into the other, that you cannot mark out the limits between them." But such obstacles didn't prevent the colonial powers from building an ideology of racial hierarchy: "the scientific classification . . . was frequently coupled with racist ideas about innate predispositions of different groups," *Wikipedia* explains, "always attributing the most desirable features to the White, European race and arranging the other races along a continuum of progressively undesirable attributes." In her 2019 paper *On Dealing with Kant's Sexism and Racism*, Pauline Kleingeld reports that, "until the mid

1790s he [Immanuel Kant] explicitly describes the 'yellow,' 'Negro,' and 'copper-red' races as having increasingly serious deficits compared to 'whites' and as lacking the capacity to govern themselves. On this basis, Kant defends white colonial rule over the rest of humankind, including the exploitation of non-white slaves . . . In his 1782 lectures on Physical Geography, Kant claims that the peoples of India would be much happier under European rule . . . and he remarks that although the inhabitants of India can be educated, this does not extend to the use of abstract concepts . . . and hence they are incapable of being magistrates." (I wondered what Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakura would have thought about this...) Showing that such ideas were tenuous and unsubstantiated, Kant himself later rejected them: "In the middle of the 1790s . . . Kant abandoned the thesis of racial hierarchy and white superiority . . . he shifts to being a vocal critic of colonialism and slavery." [4] Kant's recanting his racial theories shows how rickety they had been; but his U-turn wasn't universally adopted by the powers of the age and hypothesizing about race continued undeterred. The United States of America were also deeply invested in slavery, and so they also sought justification in the pseudo-

[4] https://philarchive.org/archive/KLEODW

science and psychobabble of the day. Two gentlemen named Alexander Thomas and Samuel Sillen described black men as uniquely fitted for bondage, because of their "primitive psychological organization." In 1840, a politically motivated and severely flawed census "claimed that Northern, free blacks suffered mental illness at higher rates than did their Southern, enslaved counterparts." The study claimed that “insanity and idiocy” was ten times more common among free Black people than among the enslaved. In other words, it was psychologically beneficial for people of African descent to remain owned and exploited by whites. In 1851 Louisiana physician Samuel A. Cartwright conjured up a fake mental illness for the tendency of slaves to seek freedom by escaping their oppressors and called it *drapetomania*, "mania of the runaway slave." He even claimed that it was a treatable disease: "with proper medical advice, strictly followed, this troublesome practice that many Negroes have of running away can be almost entirely prevented."

The English expression *race theory* - the "assertion that some racial groups are endowed with qualities deemed superior" - came about in 1894. Believers in the pseudoscientific theory of *scientific racism*, sometimes

called *biological racism*, claimed that empirical evidence existed to support or justify racial discrimination, racial inferiority, or racial superiority. The concepts of race, and the ideologies and social policies built on them, have been at the center of intense and traumatic historical processes. Think of Nazi Germany and its social policies of eugenics, aimed at the biological improvement of its citizens by selective breeding of "Nordic" or "Aryan" traits. This effort at *racial hygiene* involved compulsory sterilization and extermination of those arbitrarily branded as *Untermenschen* ("sub-humans"); an approach that culminated in the Holocaust, the systematic genocide of Jews and Romani people. In 1950 the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) formally denounced scientific racism in its statement "The Race Question." [5] The world was still licking its wounds from the devastations of World War II, ostensibly triggered by the Nazis' racial theories, and the statement reflects the wish to move away from such ideas: "For all practical social purposes 'race' is not so much a biological phenomenon as a social myth. The myth of 'race' has created an enormous amount of human and social damage. In recent years, it has taken a heavy toll in

[5] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Race_Question

human lives, and caused untold suffering." Although the introduction pompously stated that, "The competence and objectivity of the scientists who signed the document in its final form cannot be questioned," the 1950 version was heavily criticized, on several grounds, by multiple scientists. The UNESCO published revised versions in 1951, 1967, and 1978 - another sign of how humans have been struggling with the notion of race. Various theories have been battling for centuries. Ideas that at one point appeared universally accepted have been completely discarded. People who have been considered for decades as examples of human nobility - such as Gandhi - are rebranded as racists and are being pulled down from their pedestals. Even literally: in 2018 a university in Ghana, for instance, removed a statue of Gandhi due his denigratory remarks against black Africans.

Gandhi's statue being pulled down in Accra, Ghana's capital

What the *Srimad-Bhagavatam* Say about Race?

In this vertiginous sequence of ideas accepted and then discarded, in this dizzyingly kaleidoscopic intersection of anthropology, philosophy, biology, economic interests, ruthless exploitation, nationalistic feelings, excruciating pain, politics, and the pervasive false identification with the body, one may wonder: what the *Srimad-Bhagavatam*, the anchor of sanity and authentic knowledge within the hullabaloo of the iron age, says? With a great sigh of relief, we discover that the *Bhagavatam* simplifies the issue to the utmost: the human race is one; all humans belong to the same species. While listing subsequent manifestations of embodied living entities, Maitreya Muni speaks this verse:

arvāk-srotas tu navamaḥ
kṣattar eka-vidho nṛṇām
rajo 'dhikāḥ karma-parā
duḥkhe ca sukha-māninaḥ

"The creation of the human beings, who are of one species only and who stock their eatables in the belly, is the ninth in the rotation. In the human race, the mode of passion is

very prominent. Humans are always busy in the midst of miserable life, but they think themselves happy in all respects." (SB 3.10.26) This text (especially the expression *eka-vidho nṛṇām*) substantiates the contemporary understanding that all human beings belong to the same subspecies - *Homo sapiens sapiens* - and that race represents a *social construct*, with no intrinsic biological footing.

"Yes, but," one may reply, "how to reconcile this with the fact that the *Bhagavatam* also talks of different races, as in the famous *kirata-hunandra* verse?" "Good question," I would answer, "let's go and take a look at that verse (SB 2.4.18); but first of all, let's recognize that the word *race* doesn't appear in the Sanskrit:

kirāta-hūṇāndhra-pulinda-pulkaśā
ābhīra-śumbhā yavanāḥ khasādayaḥ
ye 'nye ca pāpā yad-apāśrayāśrayāḥ
śudhyanti tasmai prabhaviṣṇave namaḥ

Translation: "Kirāta, Hūṇa, Āndhra, Pulinda, Pulkaśa, Ābhīra, Śumbha, Yavana, members of the Khasa races and even others addicted to sinful acts can be purified by taking shelter of the devotees of the Lord, due to His being

the supreme power. I beg to offer my respectful obeisances unto Him." Srila Prabhupada writes in the purport: "The above-mentioned historical names are different nations of the world." In the purport he writes the word *province* twenty-two times; the expression *part of the world* six times; and the term *country* four times. The emphasis is thus geographical and ethnic rather than *racial*. The speaker of the verse, Sukadeva Goswami, is giving examples of populations "addicted to sinful acts" (*pāpā*), that is, degrading habits, harmful to spiritual growth, such as animal killing. The classification is not racial in the biological, morphological sense; it's cultural. That's why Srila Prabhupada in the purport concludes that what's needed is a "cultural propaganda," because, "Even those who are constantly engaged in sinful acts are all corrigible to the standard of perfect human beings if they take shelter of the devotees of the Lord." This will be a recurring theme in this section, how Srila Prabhupada, although at times speaking strong words about certain ethnic groups, always stressed the possibility for reformation and elevation for everyone. In fact, showing that devotion to God transcends tribal and geopolitical considerations, in the purport Srila Prabhupada glorifies great teachers appeared outside of India, outside of Indian culture: "Jesus Christ

and Muhammad, two powerful devotees of the Lord, have done tremendous service on behalf of the Lord on the surface of the globe."

The *Bhagavatam* notion of mankind as one race (*eka-vidha*) and of "races" as ethno-cultural classifications aligns with the contemporary conception: "Modern science regards race as a social construct . . . While partially based on physical similarities within groups, race does not have an inherent physical or biological meaning." (*Wikipedia*)[6] All humans belong to the *homo sapiens sapiens* subspecies. It's noteworthy that the *Bhagavatam* statements comes thousands of years before the conclusions of modern researchers, which struggled for centuries with contrasting ideas. Srila Prabhupada, as a pure teacher of the Vedic revelation, clearly states: "Although human society has different sections or subdivisions, all human beings belong to one species." (Cc, *Adi-lila* 12.73, purport) Awareness of this philosophical and anthropological framework is essential in approaching those remarks by Srila Prabhupada ostensibly infused with racial overtones.

[6] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Race_(human_categorization)

One or Four-hundred thousand?

"This is all well and good," the astute reader may retort, "but what about the recurring idea that there are four-hundred-thousand human species?" Good question, I would have to say. Let's address it. Srila Prabhupada often quoted the following *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* verse (and the first thing we notice is that the Sanskrit doesn't include the word *species*, which in the translation apparently represents the general idea of *types, kinds* or *varieties*):

jala-jā nava-lakṣāṇi
sthāvarā lakṣa-viṁśati
kṛmayo rudra-saṅkhyakāḥ
pakṣiṇāṁ daśa-lakṣaṇam
triṁśal-lakṣāṇi paśavaḥ
catur-lakṣāṇi mānuṣāḥ

“There are 900,000 species living in the water. There are also 2,000,000 nonmoving living entities (*sthāvara*), such as trees and plants. There are also 1,100,000 species of insects and reptiles, and there are 1,000,000 species of birds. As far as quadrupeds are concerned, there are 3,000,000 varieties, and there are 400,000 human species.” (Cc, *Madhya-lila* 19.138, purport) Evidently the

listing of species in the *Bhagavatam* (within the various phases of creation) do not strictly correspond to the *Viṣṇu Purana*'s classification. The *Bhagavatam* speaks of humanity appearing in the ninth creation and of eight classes of demigods appearing in the tenth. It seems that the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* includes at least some of these celestial beings within the category of *mānuṣāḥ* (humans) species. This categorization seems to be corroborated in the *Srimad-Bhagavatam*: "The celestial species of human beings, like the Gandharvas, Vidyādharas, Cāraṇas and angels, all represent His musical rhythm." (SB 2.1.36) So, the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*'s list of 400,000 humans apparently also includes varieties of celestial beings - celestial humans. Srila Prabhupada confirms it in a conversation:

Devotee: Do the number of demigods have something to do with the number of species . . .
Prabhupāda: There are . . . Thirty crores [330-million]. There are also divisions, *Gandharvas, Apsarās.*
Svarūpa Dāmodara: Do they belong to these species? They are also included in these eight-million-four-hundred? These Gandharvas?
Prabhupāda: Yes.

Svarūpa Dāmodara: So they are counted, what, as human beings?
Prabhupāda: Some of them are *devatās*, some of them are human being.

Rūpānuga: When we say four hundred thousand species of human beings, that doesn't include all the demigods then.
Prabhupāda: The demigods are like human beings.
(Conversation, Washington D.C., 4 July 1976)

So, the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*'s 400,000 human types are not limited to the human beings we observe on this planet. The following exchange, full of probing questions, illustrates a number of points. First, the term *species* should not be taken in the contemporary, genetic sense of the word: "a group of living organisms consisting of similar individuals capable of exchanging genes or interbreeding." (Google). Second, Srila Prabhupada admits that he wasn't absolutely sure of the distinctions between one human species and another ("I do not know exactly the species." Philosophy Discussion on Charles Darwin). Third, the fundamental parameter for defining the differentiation between a human species and another - even just among regular members of the *homo sapiens sapiens* subspecies -

are fundamentally cultural, not biological or physiological ("It is difference of culture, that's all"):

Prabhupāda: The species, definition of species according to biology is different. We say species means *jāti*, human race.

Śyāmasundara: So four hundred thousand species of humans.

Karandhara: Different levels of consciousness?

Prabhupāda: Yes. Different levels of consciousness.

Śyāmasundara: I see . . .

Prabhupāda: Just like we are making division that 400,000 different types of men. They will say this is one species.

Śyāmasundara: So would you say, for instance, someone who is less intelligent or more intelligent than I am is in a different species?

Prabhupāda: Less intelligent or more intelligent does not make any species, because suppose you have got five children, one is less intelligent, more intelligent.

Śyāmasundara: He was just saying levels of consciousness determine the species.

Prabhupāda: Yes. This is levels of consciousness, that just like we divide the human society: some men are

brāhmaṇas, some men are kṣatriyas, some men are vaiśyas, that can be found at any time.

Śyāmasundara: Those are species?

Prabhupāda: They are not species, according to their...

Śyāmasundara: They are types of men.

Prabhupāda: Yes. We said varieties.

Śyāmasundara: Then what is the different species of man, separate from me; for instance, what is another species that is different than I am?

Prabhupāda: I do not know exactly the species, but when we (break) . . . means *jāti, manuṣya jāti*.

Śyāmasundara: I mean what is an example of different species of man. What are they, for example, several species of men?

Prabhupāda: I say that species, this word is not applicable in that sense. In that sense, according to the scientists' species. But when we say species, class you can say. Classes.

Śyāmasundara: Classes. But what, give me an example.

Prabhupāda: Again, just like we are a class - Hare Kṛṣṇa class. Our mentality is different from others.

Śyāmasundara: Oh.

Prabhupāda: Therefore we are a class.

Śyāmasundara: So tribes, more like tribal distinctions?

Prabhupāda: We are not exactly tribal. Culture, by culture.

Śyāmasundara: By interest and culture. I see.

Prabhupāda: By differentiation of culture.

Śyāmasundara: Those are species.

Prabhupāda: Those who are Aryan, non-Aryan; just like I say, they are all human beings, but why you say one Aryan and another non-Aryan? It is difference of culture, that's all . . .

Śyāmasundara: You mean like Bengalis are a different species than Gujaratis? Something like that?

Prabhupāda: No, no. Why do you mix, we have already explained? Our *jāti* means of the same culture. He may be Gujarati, he may be Bengali, he may be American . . .

Śyāmasundara: I'm still trying to understand what you mean by the species of human life. It's not clear to me. I don't understand what you mean by the different species of human life.

Prabhupāda: By culture.

Śyāmasundara: By culture . . . So when you say 400,000 species of human life...

Prabhupāda: It is difference of culture.

Śyāmasundara: It's different from what we think of as species.
Prabhupāda: Culture.
Devotee: It's not species in the bodily [sense] . . .
Śyāmasundara: But when the scientists say "species," they mean different types of bodies.
Prabhupāda: Yes. We say 400,000 different forms of body, so human body, just like Negroes, they are also human beings, and you are also human beings. So this, scientists will say they are all one species, human being. But we say that Negro culture and the Āryan culture is different . . . Species, definition of the scientists is different from ours. We say class.
(Philosophy Discussion on Charles Darwin)

The above exchange might be a bit confusing: species, classes, biology, culture... but it gives a hint of the complex array of overlapping concepts and definitions, often loaded with emotion, we deal with when we talk about race. The last sentence, in particular, might warrant deeper analysis. What does Srila Prabhupada mean about "Negro culture"? *Negro* is a physical typology, not a uniform, homogeneous culture. A Black may work as professor of mathematics at Stanford; another may practice

cannibalism in a remote African jungle; some Blacks may be acting as Christian, Muslim or Hare Krishna religious teachers in Johannesburg; while other Blacks work as lawyers in England; some Blacks wear traditional Yoruba garb in Benin, while other Blacks dress in suit and tie in Paris, casual clothing in Brasilia, or Vaisnava robes in Vrindavana... "Negro culture" must be taken as an informal expression in a private conversation; there is no single "Negro culture," as there is no unified "white culture."

One comment is due on Srila Prabhupada's usage of the word *Negro* - a term that at present is considered impolite and offensive but that previously was perfectly acceptable. An article on the Ferris State University site says that the term *Negro* "started its decline in 1966 and was totally uncouth by the mid-1980s. The turning point came when Stokely Carmichael coined the phrase *black power* at a 1966 rally in Mississippi. Until then, *Negro* was how most black Americans described themselves."[7] Throughout Srila Prabhupada's life the word was perfectly normal and appropriate - and that's why he often used it - but people of today and tomorrow can take it as disparaging and may

[7] https://www.ferris.edu/HTMLS/news/jimcrow/question/2010/october.htm

unfairly criticize Srila Prabhupada for using it (and someone already did).

Become an Āryan! Sign Up at the ISKCON Center Near You

As far as the expression "Āryan culture," in the above conversation, from the totality of Srila Prabhupada's teaching it's clear that is something open to everyone; something that has nothing to do with physical characteristics such as skin pigmentation:

Devotee: Āryan means change in consciousness to God consciousness.
Prabhupāda: Yes.
Devotee: This means all over the world there can be an Āryan culture.
Prabhupāda: Yes, that is right . . .
Dr. Patel: Today. The Āryans have become demons.
Prabhupāda: Yes. That... anyone can become demon. A demon can become Āryan, and Āryan can become demon, by culture.
(Morning Walk, Bombay, 21 Nov 1975)

Hopefully is now clear that from the point of view of both contemporary scientific consensus and Bhagavata understanding *race* is a socio-cultural construct. Nonetheless, we also recognize that the word *race* - intended as the subdivision in groups based on morphological differences - remains in common parlance as a form of *folk taxonomy*, an everyday way to categorize things, distinct from scientific classification. We encounter such colloquial expressions on race through Srila Prabhupada's written and spoken records, notwithstanding his alignment with the views of the *Bhagavatam* and with radical Gaudiya inclusivism. Some of such statements easily fall prey to condemnations of racism, especially in the charged current atmosphere. Intellectual integrity imposes that such occasional expressions must be considered within the spiritual perspectives and the pure egalitarianism Srila Prabhupada consistently demonstrated in his life. Nevertheless, in some cases he seems to indicate certain leanings or preferences - connected with his *human side*, so to say - that may be interpreted as influenced by some degree of racial bias. I will analyze some of these passages looking for compensatory and explanatory aspects of context but without trying to artificially sanitize or suppress them. I

will also explore hypothesis on the cultural origins of such inclinations. You, the reader, shall remain the judge of the fairness and effectiveness of my attempts. I hope that if you had the patience to read with an open mind till this point, will continue to exercise the same forbearance and liberality.

"All Ugly Looking"?

Let's start, for instance, with Srila Prabhupada's purport to *Srimad-Bhagavatam* 1.11.36, which he wrote in the early 1960s, before travelling to the West: "The cupid's business is to invoke mundane lust of living being on another living being. The whole universe is moving being agitated by the cupid's arrow . . . The cupid . . . throws his arrow upon the living being to become mad after his opposite sex never mind whether the party is actually beautiful or not. Such action of the cupid is going on even on the negroes and beastly societies who are all ugly looking in the estimation of the civilized nations."

It's hard to rationalize the aesthetic appraisal of "negroes" as "all ugly looking." A possible inference or supposition: in the early 1960's, before extensive experience with Blacks

(Srila Prabhupada had never been outside of India), based on whatever limited exposure to Blacks he might have had (photos in books? Characterizations in movies? Comments by his Scottish professors?). Srila Prabhupada's grew up in an environment in which such assessment was common: "Our Sanskrit professor used to [say], 'My dear boys, even there is beauty amongst the Negroes.' He used to say." (Morning Walk, Mayapur, 23 Jan 1976) "Even . . . amongst the Negroes"; a sentence that today could cause a riot. And so, Srila Prabhupada found Blacks, as a group, physically unattractive. Hare Krishna. It's a subjective perception, but which does remain problematic and potentially puzzling for contemporary audiences.

In 2019, an article in *The New York Times* announced: "Black Women Now Hold Crowns in 5 Major Beauty Pageants." [8] It was the first time Black women simultaneously held the titles of five of the top beauty pageants: Miss Teen USA, Miss America, Miss USA, Miss World and Miss Universe. (It's called *Miss Universe* but only women from this planet participate.) You might loathe such beauty pageants, and I do share similar

[8] https://www.nytimes.com/2019/12/15/style/black-women-win-beauty-pageants.html

sentiments, but such questionable competitions do provide a sense of the prevailing aesthetic sense. Perceptions of beauty change through history. Almost 60 years before, in that purport Srila Prabhupada had given voice to what most likely represented a common aesthetic assessment, an expression of the taste shared at that time by Indians and Britishers (under whose colonial rule he had lived for more than half a century). Thus, he didn't shy from writing words that today appear cringeworthy. Perhaps, had he written the same purport 12 or 15 years later, after acquainting himself with many more people of African ancestry (including those who became his disciples), he wouldn't have made the "all ugly looking" remark, because he would have amended his aesthetic values?

The reference to "the estimation of the civilized nations" introduces a cultural element, also a questionable generalization: how can we conceive that *all* citizens of *all* "civilized nations" (whatever those may be) - consider *all* Blacks as "ugly"? Even more troubling is the apparent implication: are Blacks - or at least countries with predominantly Black demographics - not "civilized"? I am tempted to think that while writing that purport Srila

Prabhupada had only visualized an acquired, partial mental picture of exclusively those "negroes" living in jungles or savannas (a tiny percentage of the Black population).

When, after starting ISKCON, Srila Prabhupada wished to publish a new edition of the First Canto *Bhagavatam*, his disciple Satsvarupa Dasa Goswami worried about the above statement from the original volumes printed in India and expressed his concern in a letter to Srila Prabhupada. In his book *Memories of Srila Prabhupada*, he recalls: “In my letter I had pointed out how people in modern American society would never accept these statements.” (MSP 3-4, April 1968) Srila Prabhupada agreed to have the reference to Negros removed from further printings. Some devotees might thus be hearing about the above quote for the first time. They might wonder why I am exhuming a reference Srila Prabhupada himself agreed to entomb. To them I humbly say, "The cat is out of the bag"; the news has already made the rounds far and wide. Various sources quote the passage, for instance internet articles with titles such as "Racism and Caste Bigotry in the Hare Krishna Movement" or "Prabhupada Racism, Sexism, Homophobia, and Violent Theocracy." We can choose to stick our heads in the sand,

pretending the problem doesn't exist, or we can deal with the issue, which might involve recognizing that, on a cultural, psychological, acquired level - external to the soul and pertaining to his embodied circumstances - Srila Prabhupada did seem to display a degree of racial bias. At least before coming to the West and according to *racism* as defined today. What's the alternative to talking about these things? Should we leave the monopoly of such quotes and their analysis to vitriolic critics, people invested in dismissing the whole Vaisnava message as deplorable? Or should we admit that such statements are indeed problematic and then provide suggestions on how they might have insinuated themselves in the mind of a special soul? Hridayananda Maharaja writes: "Prabhupada lived most of his life in a world which regarded racism as being the moral equivalent of nationalism. Just as people feel they are morally justified in supporting and preferring their own families over other families, or their communities and countries over other communities and countries, or indeed just as there are groups that support women and criticize men, or vice versa, similarly before Hitler's atrocities, people all over the world supported and preferred their race over others. This was true not only in the West, but in Japan, India and so many other

regions. After WWII and Hitler, and after the Civil Rights movement, racism became perhaps the single most sensitive moral issue in the West. India is a different world, with a different history, and Indians of Prabhupada's generation never really learned post war Western sensitivities to race . . . Prabhupada sometimes made bold statements, but in practice, in his life, he acted as a perfect, liberal gentlemen. In the early days of ISKCON, Prabhupada personally arranged interracial, black-white, marriages, placed black disciples in high positions, and treated everyone equally."[9]

Srila Prabhupada's behavior was infused with the deep egalitarianism typical of someone who sees everyone as spirit soul. Perhaps in later years Srila Prabhupada also started seeing bodily beauty in Blacks, after meeting many of them on different continents? We don't know. What we know for sure is that ISKCON members shouldn't make derogatory, sweeping remarks about the looks of any group; even if their subjective sense of beauty urges them to do so; and even if the Founder-*Acarya* once did it in a purport - in a sentence he then agreed to remove.

[9] https://www.hdgoswami.com/racist-statements/

Condoning & Promoting Slavery?! Actually Not

One among the most befuddling of all so-called "controversial statements" by Srila Prabhupada (and the one initially I personally had the most trouble with) regards slavery. Before we get to analyze the "incriminated" conversation, we should know that Srila Prabhupada spoke in favor of the liberation of enslaved people, and we should understand *that* as his authentic and official position on slavery: "In your country the Negroes were slaves, but fortunately they have been made free." (Lecture on SB 7.9.8-10, Hawaii, 10 March 1969) Equipped with this information, we can understand the statement below - about keeping Blacks as slaves - as hyperbolic and idiosyncratic, a quirk in the dialogue, and not a reasoned, formal stand: "The Blacks were slaves; they were under control. And since we have given them equal rights, they are disturbing, most disturbing, always creating a fearful situation, uncultured and drunkards. What training they have got? They have got equal right? That is best, to keep them under control as slaves but give them sufficient food, sufficient cloth, not more than that. Then they will be

satisfied." (Conversation, Mayapur, 14 Feb 1977) Taken out of context, such affirmation appears positively shocking and incontrovertibly damning. In fact, even considering the full background, the statement remains troubling and lamentable. But by looking at the overall message of the conversation - you can read and listen to the whole thing here[10] - we can clearly discern Srila Prabhupada's overall intention to benefit all of humanity, including Blacks (although somewhat counterintuitively). We can then grasp his words as an outburst caused by the frustration of seeing African Americans often deprived of the education and support necessary to reap the benefits of freedom, with many of them wallowing in poverty, addiction and criminality, within the squalor of inner cities. Basically, Srila Prabhupada is saying, in his somewhat impetuous style: "So many African Americans are victimized by alcoholism, substandard literacy and delinquency. Rather than remaining 'independent' but miserable, they would be better off under a kind master who would take good care of them, providing for all their necessities." Was he really suggesting going back to slavery? Nah. Srila Prabhupada was just hypothetically saying that for certain individuals working under a

[10] https://vanisource.org/wiki/770214_-_Conversation_B_-_Mayapur

humane master would be preferable to their present abject condition. That's how I understand his verbal flare-up.

As often happens in conversations, topics flow here and there. This private conversation, which lasts more than an hour, goes from Gandhi to Nixon; from Vivekananda to the Kolkata lawyer that would attend social functions accompanied by "at least three, four prostitutes"; from the Russian revolution to Durga worship. In such kind of exchanges Srila Prabhupada may make some intense, radical statements that he later defuses, qualifies and mollifies. The untenable generalization of Blacks as "disturbing . . . uncultured and drunkards" is, if taken literally, totally unjustifiable, and therefore should be taken as melodramatic. Obviously, millions of African Americans are sober, religious, law-abiding citizens; and Srila Prabhupada was aware of it. The other atrocious-sounding comment, "keep them under control as slaves," obviously wasn't a practical suggestion for social policy but a passing, exasperated remark made out of vexation with a system that rubberstamped people as free citizens without providing them the knowledge, skills and values to *function* as free. Those words weren't meant as a eulogy of slavery, but a strong criticism of superficial, deceptive

social emancipation enacted by bestowing formal civic rights without providing the concomitant, necessary education and support.

The main epistemic and linguistic hurdle seems to be that in this informal and private exchange Srila Prabhupada tends to conflate the Sanskrit word *sudra* with the English word *slave*. (More on this in the next section.) The two ideas have similarities, but also fundamental differences. A slave is legally owned by the master, while the dependence of a *sudra* on their masters is mostly psychological and economic - *sudras* can walk away whenever they want; enslaved people cannot. What the *Bhagavad-gita* describes as the characteristics of *sudras* would fit most human beings: *paricaryātmakaṁ karma śūdrasyāpi svabhāva-jam* (Bg 18.44) - "labor and service to others" are most compatible with their acquired nature (the *guna-karma* mentioned in Bg 4.13). Their psycho-physical temperament makes them prone to occupations outside of the intellectual, administrative or entrepreneurial spheres. They gainfully contribute to society as artisans, performers, salaried employees, hired hands, skilled labor, factory workers, etc. When Srila Prabhupada, as we'll see below, says that *sudras* are not be given freedom, it simply means

that their work generally needs to be closely supervised. Don't factories everywhere engage managers to make sure that workers do their jobs properly? He is not saying that workers should be "owned" by their employers. Both *sudras* and enslaved people are often engaged as laborers, but enslaved people are forbidden to quit their service, and their masters treat them as their property. From the context of the exchange, Srila Prabhupada - speaking 112 years after the official abolition of slavery in the United States - seems to say that it would have been better to provide previously enslaved people with systematic educational and occupational opportunities to equip them to fully act as free citizens; rather than simply bureaucratically declare them as "free" and leave them hanging out to dry, vulnerable to again being discriminated against and to remain exposed to all forms of debasement and misconduct. Without a cultural shift in the national perception - which can be affected only by real spiritual knowledge, Blacks remained treated as second-class citizens. For instance, Blacks in the US had been theoretically equal before the law, including the right for both black men and women to vote, from 1920. However, most Blacks were effectively barred from voting until the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 - just

twelve years before this conversation took place. Formally but nominally granting rights (without honoring them) while failing to offer systematic training for scientific self-improvement won't solve social ills or uplift the disadvantaged. That's Srila Prabhupada's point.

In the exchange Srila Prabhupada stresses the need of keeping people "satisfied in all respects." He also speaks against "exploitation." As the conversation evolves, it becomes more and more clear that Srila Prabhupada welcomes and encourages everyone to elevate themselves to "perfection"; because he sees that potential in *everyone*. He says that "Human society will be always there. We have to serve them . . . We have . . . to serve the mass of people." The mood is humanitarian; not discriminatory. The conversation is, in essence, a manifesto of empathy and benevolence, a call for elevating suffering humanity to the platform of goodness and devotion through the uplifting system of devotional *varnasrama*. Undeniably, in the heat of the moment Srila Prabhupada words involves some awkward overgeneralization about African Americans, but his overarching motivation is eagerness to help the whole humanity:

Prabhupāda: Revolution means they are dissatisfied.

Satsvarūpa: French Revolution, Russian Revolution.

Prabhupāda: These things were not going nicely. Therefore gradually it broke. But if things are going nicely, people will be happy. They will not revolt. You have to keep the citizens satisfied in all respects . . . Mass of people, if they are satisfied, they will not revolt . . . There cannot be exploitation if things are made in order . . . according to the quality and work there must be division for cooperation . . . All *bhangis*, *camara*, *śūdras*, they are simply given vote. That's all. Where is the training? . . . Everybody's *śūdra* . . . *Śūdra* is to be controlled only. They are never given to be freedom. Just like in America: the blacks were slaves; they were under control. And since we have given them equal rights, they are disturbing, most disturbing, always creating a fearful situation, uncultured and drunkards. What training they have got? They have got equal right? That is best, to keep them under control as slaves but give them sufficient food, sufficient cloth, not more than that. Then they will be satisfied.

Hari-śauri: If that's done, then how will those who have some potential to be educated, how will we recognize them?

Prabhupāda: Either educate them or control them. Give them facility of education. But there is no education at all. Even for the whites there is no education. So we are stressing on the point of education . . . In that education we don't discriminate because he's coming of a *śūdra* family. Take education . . . our duty is that we shall arrange the external affairs all so nicely that one day they will come to the spiritual platform very easily . . . then this base quality, *rajas-tamaḥ*, ignorance and passion . . . these things go . . . At the present moment the idea is: if one remains a *śūdra*, then he cannot get perfection . . . Let them do, according to *śāstra*, the work of *śūdra* or *vaiśya*. He'll get the perfection. Perfection is not checked . . . let him live in his position and become perfect . . . we have to introduce this *varṇāśrama-dharma*. It must be done perfectly, and it is possible, and people will be happy . . . So as Kṛṣṇa conscious men, we should try to save them. That is the duty . . . To save these mass people from falling down to the repetition of birth and death, that is welfare activity . . . Human society will be always there. We have to serve them, *para-upakāra*. We have to keep them in the right position . . . In order to serve the mass of people, to bring them to the ideal position, we should try to

introduce this *varṇāśrama* . . . Now here is a very nice institution for the benefit of the whole society, human. (Conversation, Mayapur, 14 Feb 1977)

When Srila Prabhupada first arrived in Nairobi, Kenya, he was warmly received by the Indians living there. They offered him the best room in their homes and the ladies elaborately cooked for him. But Srila Prabhupada had not come to enjoy their hospitality. The *Śrīla Prabhupāda-līlāmṛta* describes: "Prabhupāda wasn't satisfied preaching only to the Indians. He wanted to preach to the Africans . . . Prabhupāda impressed on Brahmānanda Swami that his first duty in Africa was to give Kṛṣṇa consciousness to the Africans. Because of bad experience in Turkey and Pakistan, Brahmānanda Swami had been reluctant to hold public *kīrtanas* in Nairobi. Besides, the Africans spoke mostly Swahili; they were culturally different and usually too poor to buy books, so Brahmānanda Swami didn't know how to preach to them effectively. Going to the Indians had been easy and natural. But Prabhupāda wanted the Africans. 'It is an African country,' he said simply. 'They are the proprietors. We should be preaching to them' . . . This should be Brahmānanda Swami's mission in Africa, Prabhupāda insisted – offering Kṛṣṇa

consciousness to the Africans . . . Kṛṣṇa consciousness should not be just another Nairobi Hindu religious society. The Hindus should take part by donating money, but Brahmānanda Swami's preaching and recruiting should be among the Africans. When several black American disciples joined Prabhupāda in Nairobi, Prabhupāda told them, 'Four hundred years ago your ancestors were taken away from here as slaves. But ah, just see how you have returned as masters!'" (*Śrīla Prabhupāda-līlāmṛta*, Chapter 36) Does that sound to you as someone promoting slavery?

Nairobi, Kenya, 1971

Conflating Slaves, *Śūdras*, Indentured Servants & Employees

Srila Prabhupada occasionally appears to use distinct terms as synonyms. This creates confusion (and commotion). This conflating or overlapping of various words seems to be at the root of the uproar generated by some of his statements involving slavery. For instance, in the following excerpt from a lecture, Srila Prabhupada compares *śūdras*, enslaved people, animals and children - obviously a wide range of beings - based on their sharing the feature of *dependence* on someone else: "*Śūdra* means almost animal life—no cleanliness, no hygienic principle, simply working for living. No other ambition, no spiritual education, but some way or other filling our life. Just like animals, they become dependent on somebody. Whatever he likes, he can do on that animal. *Śūdra* is not so dependent, but actually they were dependent. Just like in your country the Negroes were slaves, but fortunately they have been made free. Actually, they were being treated just like animals. So *śūdra* life means completely dependent on the other three higher class. So everyone is born *śūdra*. Just like this child. This child is dependent completely. Just like animal is

dependent, the child is also dependent. So they say, Vedic learned scholars, they say *janmanā jāyate śūdraḥ*. Everyone is born a *śūdra*, completely dependent." (Lecture on SB 7.9.8-10, Hawaii, 10 March 1969) Another form of "unfree labor" that Srila Prabhupada mentions as a type of slavery, is when those in economic distress would "sell" themselves, pledging to work for the master, in a form of indentured servitude: "*Sevakaḥ*, servant. Still, in India . . . There are professional class of servant, they voluntarily sell themselves to the master: 'Sir, I'll require five hundred rupees, and if you advance me this five hundred rupees I shall remain lifelong your servant.' Still you get. Formerly they were slaves, slave trade, but... you'll get it still. You advance the servant class, *śūdra* class—nowadays may not be five hundred; you advance five thousand—you can purchase him. There will be agreement, that is lawful, that 'He has to work lifelong.'" (Lecture on SB 7.6.10, Vrindavana, 12 Dec 1975)

An instance of apparent merging of nomenclature happens during a morning walk in Rome. The exchange is also significant because although some of Srila Prabhupada's suggestions may appears harsh - for instance when he says that *śūdras* "should not possess, so that they will work

always" - they are balanced by his overall benevolent mood: "You should keep them such nicely and friendly way . . . give them all protection, then they will be happy." I find it interesting that he includes the example of Japanese workers and company "directors." But what I find most relevant to our analysis comes at the beginning, when he connects the idea of obliging unproductive *śūdras* to work with "the idea of slaves" - although the two concepts are quite different. Obviously Srila Prabhupada wasn't always using *slave* according to the dictionary meaning, but in an atypical way, amalgamating different definitions:

Prabhupāda: If one does not obey the social structure, he must be forced. That is the idea of slaves. The *śūdras* who do not work properly, he must be forced. Nobody should remain unemployed. The *śūdras* are inclined. If he has got something to eat, he will not work. You see? Then again he will work when his need, eating. This is *śūdra* mentality.

Bhagavān: So they have to be kept employed.

Prabhupāda: Yes. They have to be... they should not possess, so that they will work always.

Yogeśvara: Yeah, but that was exactly the situation that sparked the Communist revolution. When the workers felt themselves exploited, then they revolted.

Prabhupāda: No, workers, what is that? Exploited?

Yogeśvara: Yes, when the *śūdras* were seeing that, "Oh, these men, they are keeping us as slaves, and they are making us work just for our food," then they revolted.

Prabhupāda: No, no. You should keep them such nicely and friendly way, they will never think like that. They will think that you are giving him food and shelter, and we are taking care, giving them protection to their family. Then they will be happy. Then they are happy. When you give them all protection, then they will be happy. Now . . . just like in Japan. The industrialists give all men. They give food. They give education. They give shelter. So they work very happily.

Bhagavān: They like to work.

Prabhupāda: Yes.

Bhagavān: It's not that people like to be idle.

Prabhupāda: I have seen. And the Dai Nippon directors, they live very poorly, but still, they do not like to give up the service, because they are assured of their family

protection, medicine, food, education . . . never mind it is not very luxurious. Still, they stick. That I have seen.

Yogeśvara: Because there are good benefits.

Prabhupāda: Good benefits, yes. If you are assured of your food, shelter and necessities of life, then you will never grudge. That was the system.

(Morning Walk, Rome, 27 May 1974)

The previous day, also while walking and talking with his disciples, Srila Prabhupada had said certain things that may sound seriously problematic. Let's take a look. I will comment below:

Bhagavān: They kept many slaves, the Romans.

Prabhupāda: Eh? They had many slaves. Yes. Slaves? This word is used in Vedic language also, slave. The Africans, they were meant for becoming slaves . . . the Kirātas, they were always slaves of the Āryans. The Āryan people used to keep slaves, but they were treating slaves very nicely. Later on it degraded. Otherwise, slaves were kept just like family members.

Bhagavān: No resentment. They had no resentment.

Prabhupāda: No, they were very happy. Just like you keep a dog: it is slave, but it is very happy under the protection of good master.

Bhagavān: Actually, they like to work hard.

Prabhupāda: Yes, they like to work hard and they want good protection. That is their happiness. Even still in Africa, the servants, domestic servants, Africans, I have seen in Indian family, they are very happy. They are very happy, and the master also takes care of them. They want to eat sumptuously, and that's all. They have no other ambition. They don't want any motorcar or like this. No. And they work very nicely, domestic work, very clean. But sometimes they steal. That is their habit. My father used to say: "If you do not allow the servants to steal, so don't keep. Don't keep servants, A servant who does not steal, he is not a gentleman. He must steal."

Bhagavān: He must steal.

Prabhupāda: Yes. That is their satisfaction. So you must allow them. (chuckles) In old *zamindar* [landowner] family, they will pay the manager five rupees per month, salary, and allow them to steal. That was simply a token salary that, "You are servant." And the manager was so clever, he would steal, but he would not spoil the property of his master. He will manage very nicely . . . make extra

income and steal . . . constructing big building, getting his sons and daughters married very luxuriantly.
(Morning Walk, Rome, 27 May 1974)

Here we see another example of Srila Prabhupada talking about different social classes but referring to them as a single broad group - which we could call *dependent workers*: enslaved persons, "domestic servants" and even managers of presumably large estates - large enough for them (who apparently had extensive financial control) to get rich by siphoning off substantial amounts of money. Of interest is Srila Prabhupada's expression "This word is used in Vedic language also, slave." It turns out that the status of slaves in ancient India is still a matter of debate among academics, especially because of the ambiguity of the terminology. This is what *Wikipedia* says: "Early sources suggest that slavery was likely to have been a widespread institution in ancient India by the lifetime of the Buddha (sixth century BCE), and perhaps even as far back as the Vedic period. However, its study in ancient times is problematic and contested because it depends on the translations of terms such as *dasa* and *dasyu* . . . [which have] been interpreted as 'servant' or 'slave', but others have contested such meaning. The term *dāsa* in the

Rigveda, has been also translated as an enemy, but overall the identity of this term remains unclear and disputed among scholars . . . According to Micheline Ishay – a professor of human rights studies and sociology, the term 'dasa' can be 'translated as slave'. The institution represented unfree labor with fewer rights, but 'the supposed slavery in [ancient] India was of mild character and limited extent'"[11] which matches Srila Prabhupada viewpoint: "The Āryan people used to keep slaves, but they were treating slaves very nicely. Later on it degraded. Otherwise, slaves were kept just like family members." The comment "Later on it degraded" indicates that Srila Prabhupada was talking of a kind of *slavery* that had disappeared and not as an endorsement of recent or contemporary enslavement practices. More troublesome is the sentence: "The Africans, they were meant for becoming slaves . . . the Kirātas, they were always slaves of the Āryans." Obviously, we can't take it literally that Africans "were meant for becoming slaves" as it would be indefensible both morally and historically. First of all, Africa is a large continent full of different ethnic groups, each full of individuals of different natures. Therefore it appears that Srila Prabhupada was simply emphasizing his

[11] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Slavery_in_India

perception that in Africa, on the whole, a large percentage of people have the general predisposition to act and work primarily as *śūdras*. As Srila Prabhupada explained on multiple occasions, the archetypical divisions of *varnasrama* exist everywhere, and so also in traditional Africa we find kings, warriors, shamans, priests, medicine-men, traders, hunters, artisans and so on - and certainly not a prevalence of (literally) enslaved persons. Again, it seems that Srila Prabhupada conflates *slaves* with *śūdras* - and in fact he mentions his experience in Africa with Indian families and their local housekeepers - which were not enslaved persons but hired domestic workers.

We must take also as a generalization his assertion that such servants "want to eat sumptuously" and "have no other ambition. They don't want any motorcar or like this." Different people have different personal hopes and aspirations. The sentence "the Kirātas, they were always slaves of the Āryans" is particularly tricky to unpack. As we will see in more detail later, Srila Prabhupada used *Kirāta* as an umbrella term for a number of ethnic groups, including indigenous to India, and as a general term for Africans (again in his style of broad generalizations). The word *Āryan* - with its creepy twentieth century's

connection with Hitler and the Nazis - was consistently used by Srila Prabhupada to indicate a cultural identity, and not a racial classification: "Real Āryan means one who is advanced in spiritual consciousness. He is Āryan. Not a class of men . . . in the Āryan civilization there was Vedic culture. That is Āryan." (Lecture on SB 1.15.25-26, Los Angeles, 4 Dec 1973) Occasionally, however, he referred to the blood descendants of the original followers of the Vedas also as *Āryans* - even if not adhering anymore to Vedic standards: "They were belonging to the Āryan family. The Europeans, they were also Āryan family, and Indians, the Arabians, Persians, they were all Āryan family. And the Americans, they also migrated from Europe. So they are also Āryans. But that is familywise. But actually Āryan means one who is advanced in civilization. That is Āryan . . . A demon can become Āryan, and Āryan can become demon, by culture." (Morning Walk, Bombay, 21 Nov 1975) Therefore, when Srila Prabhupada informally and colloquially states that, "Kirātas, they were always slaves of the Āryans," he presumably meant that Africans have traditionally been victims of slave traders from Europe, America, Arab countries and India - and not that the original Vedic followers in *Bharata-varsa* regularly

imported enslaved people from Africa - a notion for which there is no historical support.

Third Class? Not Bad at All

In other statements - at other times and places - Srila Prabhupada seems to betray some degree of aversion towards Blacks. For instance: "It is all nonsense civilization. A first-class Rolls Royce car, and who is sitting there? A third-class negro. This is going on. You'll find these things in Europe and America. This is going on. A first-class car and a third-class negro." (Room Conversation, Mauritius, 5 Oct 1975). Now, grammatically, saying that "a third-class negro" may drive an expensive car is not in itself an assertion that all negroes are third-class. Also, the sentence sounds like a gratuitous denigration of Blacks, but if seen within Srila Prabhupada's caustic characterizations of modern society, the "third-class" epithet doesn't sound too belittling: "There is no first-class men, no second-class men, even no third class. That means all fourth-class, fifth-class. That's all. This is the human society, combination of fourth-, fifth-, tenth-class men . . . There is no first-class men, there is no second-class men, not even third-class men." (Conversation,

Vrindavana, 6 Nov 1976) So within Srila Prabhupada's sharp, stinging social taxonomy "third-class" is not bad; not bad at all.

Frankly, in some cases Srila Prabhupada has been criticized as a racist for making plain, commonsense observation. The following two quotes, for instance, have been accused of "racial prejudice" on the Internet - on flimsy grounds, I believe: "I don't think the Negro question is solved . . . The whites, they do not like the Negroes still. Wherever there are Negroes, in that quarter the whites do not go in. So is it not? They do not go. Although they have been given equal right, but at heart the whites, they do not like it." (Room Conversation, Tehran 10 Aug 1976) Isn't that generally a fact? What's wrong with the comment? Srila Prabhupada here only reports about the attitude of a group toward another. He is not making any qualitative judgement.

Another quote that, I believe, has been undeservedly criticized: "In England still, the rich quarter is different from the poor quarter. Is it not? . . . Even in America, they don't like to live with the blacks . . . 'Birds of the same feather flock together.'" (Conversation, Allahabad, 11 Jan 1977) We might wish that all ethnic groups would gladly

live together and happily intermingle - that's another thing - but Srila Prabhupada here only shares some accurate anthropological (and ornithological) observations. What is there to object?

One more Conversation that may "Create Havoc"

Following is another conversation that made the rounds due to incendiary comments about African Americans, who, allegedly, "are not civilized," and who, "if they don't get money . . . will create havoc." So, let's look at the context and contents of the exchange. The private, free-wheeling 1977 conversation focuses on pointing out various contemporary ills. It's long. More than 100 minutes. Talking on manifold topics, Srila Prabhupada and his disciples enthusiastically and informally bash at will a number of philosophical misunderstandings, pseudo-spiritual leaders and groups, socio-economic issues and more:

Prabhupāda: "So many rascals are going and talking nonsense . . . People are suffering by their concocted

culture" - The mood is strongly disapproving, and generalizations do fly around:

Rāmeśvara: Of course, in America they have no experience with saintly men. There has never been a saintly man in the history of America. (laughter)

Prabhupāda: (laughs) Yes.

This, of course, should be taken as a hyperbole, an exaggeration, not a literal fact; as other overstatements:

Prabhupāda: They [Americans] do not believe even Jesus Christ.

Gargamuni: No, they don't believe.

This is obviously not true literally, as millions of Americans profess and practice their faith in Jesus. The whole exchange participates in a special *rasa*, in which guru and disciples, legitimately frustrated by the state of the world, privately indulge in clobbering everyone and everything - often crossing the lines of factual accuracy. The conversation shows a merry band of Hare Krishnas in a particularly pugnacious mood, their motley dialogue flowing kaleidoscopically, in an almost dizzying way: "The Essene Gospel of John the Baptist" and the Vatican library allegedly not allowing access to it; vegetarian Christians;

Christian abortionists; Jesus speaking about reincarnation in the Aquarian Gospel; "A new movie in America which shows that Jesus was not even religious." The conversation is peculiar as often the disciples go on talking, debating each other's points while Srila Prabhupada silently listens. You can read and hear the whole thing on Vanipedia.[12] At one point the dialogue turns to Aurobindo, "The Aurobindo was a hippie (laughter)," and how "he was victimized by that mother." Then to Auroville; Gargamuni: "The whole thing is a bluff." The dialogue shifts to Transcendental Meditation; Maharishi; Billy Graham; the Ramakrishna Mission; the Divine Life; Sivananda and how, apparently, his students "sued him one time because he preaches *brahmācārya*." Srila Prabhupada states that he has seen, "*sannyāsī* kissing woman on the street."

Then they move to Rajneesh (Osho) and his "neo-*sannyāsa.*" Srila Prabhupāda tells that: "Rajneesh makes husband and wife *sannyāsī*." Such *gurus* are dismissed in short order. I am getting into some detail here to show the laid-back and confrontational tone of the exchanges:

[12] https://vanisource.org/wiki/770121_-_Conversation_B_-_Bhuvanesvara

Gargamuni: Sai Baba is under fire now, because they say that he produces small things which you can hide in his robe. So they ask, "Why can't you make a big thing?"
Hari-śauri: Like a motorcar . . .

Prabhupāda: His bodily feature is just like *rākṣasa*.

Devotees: Oh, yes!

This conversation represent a cathartic carnival of whacking and smashing almost everyone and everything - including the American space program:

Prabhupāda: And you said that they are drinking their own urine?

Hari-śauri: Yes. The astronauts.

Prabhupāda: It is a fact?

Rāmeśvara: Yes. They recycled it.

Hari-śauri: They recycled it. After they passed urine, they put it through a machine that was supposed to purify it, and then they could drink it again.

Prabhupāda: And still, they have to go to the Mars. Just see how degraded they have become. By drinking urine, they are going to Mars and bringing report. All false propaganda to keep the prestige of the scientists.

Hari-śauri: Yes. It's just a colossal hoax.

Rāmeśvara: No, they will go on and on with their bluffs. They will try to bluff that they are creating life, just like they've bluffed they've gone to other planets.

Prabhupāda: Everything bluff. I never believed them.

They move to society's socio-economic problems; they criticize the monetary system. Rāmeśvara recalls: "You mentioned about the gold standard, that this is very bad, this artificial standard of monetary exchange." Then they move on to self-sufficiency. Srila Prabhupada says: "If we concentrate in farm project there will be no need of exchange, because I'll be satisfied with my products, that's all . . . There is no need of artificial... So this banking, 'fanking,' everything will collapse automatically." They emphasize out how neither Marx nor Gandhi could fix society. Then they start talking about the need for employment, a prelude to the comments on Blacks:

Prabhupāda: Kṛṣṇa never said that "You sit down, lazy." You must work . . .

Gargamuni: Māyā's kick in India is that . . . they go to school, and when they come out there's no job.

Prabhupāda: No job.

Gargamuni: And they have to become these... They work in the hotels, the five stars. Hotel work.

Prabhupāda: No. There was a news, "For five hundred post there was three lakhs' application."

Hari-śauri: In the railways.

Prabhupāda: In the railway. There were five hundred posts vacant, and the application was three lakhs . . . Therefore they became Naxalites.

Gargamuni: Yes. These Naxalites come from the educated classes.

Prabhupāda: Yes.

Rāmeśvara: What is that Naxal...?

Prabhupāda: Naxalite means...

Gargamuni: Terrorists. Communists.

Prabhupāda: Regular dacoits, thieves, rogues. "Pay me; otherwise kill you." And if you don't—"Kill you." That's all.

At this point the discussion is about to shift to the issue of unemployment and addiction among African Americans. Obviously, they are only talking about low-income, poorly educated people living in crime-ridden area - but, in the bulldozing, bludgeoning style of the conversation, the

factual distinctions get blurred; and the comment ends up portraying Blacks in general:

Rāmeśvara: That's the trend, then, everywhere, because unemployment is increasing.

Prabhupāda: And especially in your country it will be dangerous because these blacks, if they don't get employment, they will create havoc, these blacks. And they are not civilized. They want money, and if they don't get money, then they will create havoc.

Gargamuni: Money and liquor.

Hari-śauri: Yes. If they do get money, they just buy it.

Prabhupāda: Money they get. But they can live. But there is no culture; they want liquor.

(Conversation, Bhubaneswar, 21 Jan 1977)

Taken out of context, these few sentences about Blacks may appear as racist labeling; but are just "shorthand" expressions within a group showing concern for social ills such as unemployment and alcoholism. The phrases, as spoken, are technically inaccurate, because only a portion of Blacks are jobless, addicted or criminal. Also, we cannot ignore or minimize the consequences of enslavement and racial discrimination on African Americans. For instance,

one of the primary ways Americans built wealth was through homeownership; and in the first half of the 20th century Black Americans were forced to buy homes in particular areas, homes that were valued less than those in white neighborhoods. It's certainly more likely for African Americans to "create havoc" if they grow up in single-parent homes, with substandard education, in dilapidated housing within neighborhoods infested with drug abuse and violent gangs; if they experience police brutality, the courts' racial bias in sentencing or (let's not forget) the tendency of certain politicians who, to attract votes, encourage Black victimhood and dependence. There are social, economic, political, cultural and historical roots to the situation; but the appalling statistics remain; for instance, nearly three out of four Black babies are born to single mothers. It's sad, but it's a fact that crime rates, arrest rates and incarceration rates are higher among the Black population. Srila Prabhupada wasn't denying the causes of the problems; but his remark stressing how a particular group creates "havoc" wasn't fully unjustified or prejudiced - and his American disciples could clearly understand what he was talking about. Notwithstanding, the casual reader can certainly take the exchange as racially biased.

The conversation continues in its own meandering way, twisting and turning; mentioning scandals connected to welfare cheques; the Australian federal debt; the Arabs blackmailing the West with oil; the Hindu-Muslim riots; Jesus' resurrection; Lord Buddha; Krishna begetting ten sons from each of His wives; Lord Ramacandra; Vivekananda; Cinmayananda; Ramakrishna; Lord Caitanya; getting a temple in Bangladesh; the Caitanya Matha; Tirtha Maharaja... The exchange flows forcefully ahead like a raging river. And so, in the swaying exchange, within the stream of unabashed censuring, people of intellectual integrity shouldn't take too seriously an isolated generalization about African Americans.

Native Americans as "Less Intelligent"?

Blacks weren't the only ethnic group Srila Prabhupada expressed disparaging generalizations about. Another group he made unflattering remarks about was the Native Americans - which he referred to as "Red Indians" - a terms considered today old fashioned and offensive. I don't believe Srila Prabhupada meant any disrespect by that

expression, which only relatively recently became objectionable. In fact, in his 1989 book *Wicked Words*, Hugh Rawson writes: "*Indian* is unusual among ethnic terms for not having much pejorative value until comparatively recently." So, presumably "Red Indians" was just the term Srila Prabhupada had been familiar with throughout his life. Although he didn't mean "Red Indians" as a racial slur, some of the things he said about them weren't too congratulatory; and by contemporary standards some of his remarks would be considered totally inappropriate. For instance: "In this land of America . . . the Red Indians were there. They could not develop this American land so nicely, nice cities, because they are less intelligent." (Lecture on SB, New York, 16 April 1969) Again demeaning the Native Americans' brainpower, he said: "The Europeans . . . went to America, and the American land was there. The ingredients were there. But because the Red Indians, they had no sufficient intelligence, they could not make America like present time. Lack of intelligence." (Lecture on Bg 13.3, Hyderabad, 19 April 1974) Let's consider these statements. Besides the fact that Native Americans come in many varieties - the federal government recognizes 574 tribes - talking about the intelligence of different ethnic groups is

always sensitive and controversial, a true anthropological and political minefield. Nonetheless, within the available, limited theoretical and measurement frameworks, some differences do appear. *Wikipedia*, for instance, informs us: "With the inception of IQ testing in the early 20th century, differences in average test performance between racial groups were observed, though these differences have fluctuated and in many cases steadily decreased over time . . . In the US, individuals identifying themselves as Asian generally tend to score higher on IQ tests than Caucasians, who tend to score higher than Hispanics, who tend to score higher than African Americans. Nevertheless, greater variation in IQ scores exists within each ethnic group than between them."[13] Obviously, in human interactions we are not dealing with statistics but with individuals who, regardless of their ancestry, might be remarkably smart or not particularly sharp. The *Wikipedia* article also points out: "Further complicating the issue . . . intelligence has no undisputed definition. The validity of IQ testing as a metric for human intelligence is itself disputed . . . Today, the scientific consensus is that genetics does not explain differences in IQ test performance between racial groups, and that observed differences are therefore environmental

[13] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Race_and_intelligence

in origin." What about Native Americans IQ testing? A general criticism we hear is that such tests were inherently Euro-centric and therefore didn't capture the correct data. For example, a question that asks children to pair items might include a cup and a saucer; but if you come from a home where cups and saucers were never used, you might not be able to see a connection. The following test, however, did control for variables, measuring extraneous factors and accounting for them statistically. I am not suggesting it was *perfect*, but here it's a short excerpt about its results: Professor Morton Beiser, writes in his 2000 paper, *Accounting for Native/Non-Native Differences in IQ Scores*: "[S]cores were collected from 691 Native and 234 non-Native children in Grades 2 and 4. Samples were drawn from each of four sites in North America: Northern Woodlands, Plains, Northwest coast, and Southwest Desert. Native children had substantially lower IQ scores than non-Native." The paper evokes environmental and developmental causes: "Biopsychosocial variables including maternal and child health, socioeconomic status, parental attitudes toward school and toward cultural separation, and children's English-language skills accounted for 67% of the Native/non-Native difference on the Performance subscale and 57% of the Verbal subscale

score difference."[14] So, Srila Prabhupada's labeling of Native Americans as "less intelligent" can't be arbitrarily or emotionally dismissed as baseless; but contemporary sensitivities would find the observation significantly impolite and politically incorrect. There might be many immediate or historical causes to different IQ results; regardless, Srila Prabhupada's remark cannot be rejected offhandedly.

Stunted Development

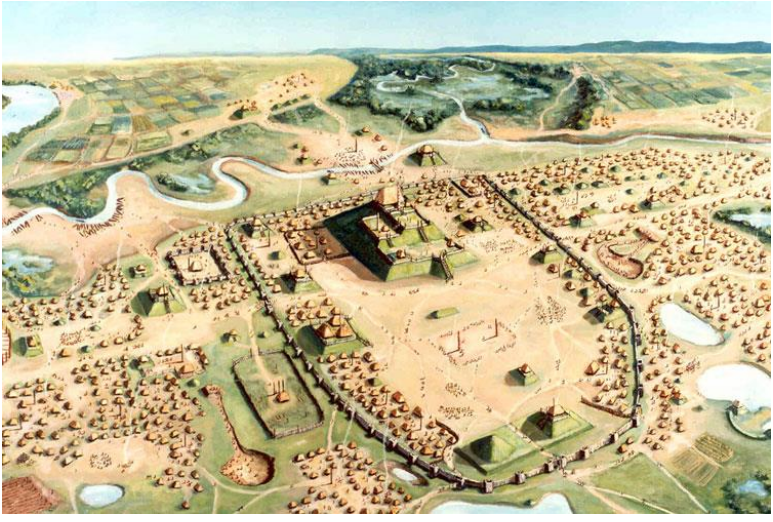
More than once Srila Prabhupada questioned the Native Americans capacity for development: "In this America, the Red Indians were there, but they could not develop the country." (Lecture on SB 1.16.17, Los Angeles, 12 Jan 1974) "The whole America once belonged to the Red Indians. Why they could not improve? The land was there. Why these foreigners, the Europeans, came and improved?" (Philosophy Discussion on John Dewey) Notwithstanding, we should also note that he protested the genocidal policies of the colonial powers: "The Americans, they were

[14] https://www.researchgate.net/publication/229452039_Accounting_for_NativeNon-Native_Differences_in_IQ_Scores

all Europeans, and they entered this American land, killed so many Red Indians. So these kind of things are going on, but that does not mean that is the law. You killed so many Red Indians for your benefit, but you have to suffer for that." (Lecture on SB 6.1.39-40, Surat, 21 Dec 1970) So, Srila Prabhupada didn't have much instinctive admiration for Native Americans, but certainly he didn't condone the violence committed against them. Another category of comments that need analysis are those on the level of civilization and development of the Native Americans, such as this: "I understand," Srila Prabhupada said, "that in America the Red Indians, who are supposed to be not civilized, they had also a religious system." (Lecture on NOD, Vrindavana, 1 November 1972) He also said: "In this land of America, the Red Indians were living. Still they are living. But their standard of living, their standard of the same demands of the body, is different from the civilized nations who have come from Europe to this country. Therefore it is, America, is now so rich, because their standard of living and their standard of living is different. They could also develop this country very nicely, but their civilization, their standard of living, their consciousness, was different." (Lecture on SB 5.5.2, Boston, 28 April 1969) By a modern, revisionist outlook, some may say that

it was just a different type of civilization and development, which we shouldn't necessarily judge higher or lower. Human perceptions pass through different phases in interpreting the past and assigning meanings and values. All such fluctuations hover on the mental platform, and they are later replaced by other feelings and ideas. A more reliable approach would be to base notions of a society's worth on the *Gita*'s tripartite *guna* categorization. Often Srila Prabhupada criticized certain modern American developments as the result of the mode of passion, "To live in the cities, big, big cities, skyscraper building, this is *rajo-guṇa*." (Lecture on SB 6.1.47, Dallas, 29 July 1975) But he thought that the previous controllers of North America were in the mode of ignorance: "Developed nations and not developed nations. This America belonged to the Red Indians. And because they are not developed, their condition was developed, ah, different from the present America. They could not construct such big, big house, and big, big roads, and like that, because they are in ignorance." (Interview, Los Angeles, 3 June 1976) Such generalizations need some unpacking. *Civilization*, for instance, is a delicate and intricate concept, often connected with the creation of urban communities, a complex social structure and the development of

agriculture. Before the arrival of the Europeans, some Native American groups did build substantial urban centers such as Cahokia, in what is now southern Illinois.



Cahokia, artist rendition

Wikipedia explains, "Archaeologists estimate the city's population at between 6,000 and 40,000 at its peak . . . If the highest population estimates are correct, Cahokia was larger than any subsequent city in the United States until the 1780s, when Philadelphia's population grew beyond 40,000."[15] The higher estimates make the population of

[15] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cahokia

13th-century Cahokia equal to or larger than the population of 13th-century London. In another example or urban development, the builders in Chaco Canyon, in what is now New Mexico, developed sophisticated stone-masonry techniques and erected 150 multi-story structures, some five to six stories high. Archeologist Mary Metcalf estimates that 805,000 man-hours were required to build the 600-room structure of Pueblo Bonito, the settlement's most important project.

Pueblo Bonito, digital reconstruction

Nonetheless, such developments appear to have been the exceptions rather than the norm. In terms of economic arrangements, some tribes focused mostly on hunting,

fishing and gathering, while others concentrated more on agriculture and trade. And so it would be hard to corroborate the idea that *all* Native Americans were "not civilized." Notwithstanding, what appears incontrovertible is that Native American nations didn't possess the technological and cultural sophistication of the invading Europeans. For instance, at the time of first European contact, none of the indigenous tribes had a native writing system (one of the key elements associated with advanced civilizations). Therefore, Srila Prabhupada's comments were legitimate, although nowadays his generalization about Native Americans would raise eyebrows and serious concerns. Again, Srila Prabhupada wasn't - and never claimed to be - omniscient about material reality. Some of the generalizations he expressed, which by today's standards appear disturbing, were acquired by exposure to his contemporary sources. Perceptions and sensitivities shift, sometimes drastically and diametrically. Just consider how, within a few decades of the twentieth century, the Hollywood movie industry shifted its predominant depiction of Native Americans from depicting them as barbarian, bloodthirsty savages - always the ruthless villains - to presenting them as noble, principled victims, who were living in a higher harmony with Nature than their

conquerors. Conversely, the movies portrayals of U.S. federal forces and frontier adventurers changed from showing them as courageous, virtuous civilizers to often painting them as cruel, coarse and abusive exploiters.

Adolf Hitler

I include this section within the discussion on racism because even a remotely positive remark about Hitler is often taken as an indirect, albeit significant, affront against Jews, whom he persecuted. Srila Prabhupada's connection with Hitler may appear ambivalent to someone who comes across a decontextualized quote on the Internet, but the fact is that Srila Prabhupada called Hitler a demon, a leader of materialism, a "gigantic killer of human beings," an atheist, a fool and a rascal. Srila Prabhupada includes him in a list of seriously ungodly characters: "There were so many *asuras* in this world. There were Lenin, there were Stalin, there were Hitler, there were Hiraṇyakaśipu. So many." (Lecture on SB 1.8.20, Mayapur, 30 Sept 1974) The extended record shows that Srila Prabhupada's overall appraisal of Hitler was super-negative. Srila Prabhupada, for instance, blamed Hitler for World War II and the destruction it brought: "Hitler unnecessarily picked up

some war, and there was devastation all over the world. You see? There was no gain. The Germany become defeated and bifurcated. So this leader could not do anything good to the nation, but unnecessarily picked up some quarrel." (Lecture on SB 6.1.19, Los Angeles, 15 Jan 1970) Srila Prabhupada also roasted Hitler's speculative interpretation of Aryanism:

Prabhupāda: The Āryans will take the words of God as it is, without any deviation. That is Āryan. An Āryan means advanced, advanced in knowledge . . . Everyone is claiming "Āryan," but he does not know what is the business of Āryans. Simply by some bodily feature... The same ignorance—"I am this body." So by the bodily features they settle up: "This is from Āryan family; this is from non-Āryan family" . . .

Brahmānanda: Adolf Hitler adopted the idea of Āryan, but his criteria for Āryan was one who had blond hair and blue eyes.

Prabhupāda: That is bodily. (chuckles) That is another foolishness . . . Just like we have dress . . . Hitler studies by the dress. That is the foolishness.

(Morning Walk, Vrindavana, 4 Sept 1975)

I am not sure where Srila Prabhupada got it from, but he had heard an elaborate, erroneous story about Hitler getting the atomic bomb but not dropping it. That made Srila Prabhupada express some sympathy for the Nazi leader: "The atom bomb . . . was in possession of Hitler. And your American stolen and kept it. Hitler wanted to use it, but, good sense, he did not like. He said that 'I can do it immediately, but I will not do it.' So three bombs they kept ready, and when Germany was in awkward condition these Americans, they stolen, and they used it in Japan. This was manufactured by the German." (Morning Walk, Honolulu, 16 June 1975) In this made-up narrative, Hitler's supposed (but fictional) decision not to drop the bomb appears commendable: "He was gentleman. But these people are not gentlemen . . . He said that 'I can smash the whole world, but I do not use that weapon.' The Germans already discovered. But out of humanity they did not use it." (Morning Walk, Bombay, 20 Nov 1975) Probably, with the benefit of more accurate information, Srila Prabhupada's views of Hitler would have been even less conciliatory. On another morning stroll he made similar remarks, repeating the same fictitious story, received God knows from where. Interestingly, a disciple

also believed that Germans did invent the atomic bomb before the Americans:

Devotee: Adolf Hitler was vegetarian.
Prabhupāda: Who? . . .
Svarūpa Dāmodara: Hitler.
Prabhupāda: Ah. He is a good man.
Devotee: Oh!
Prabhupāda: Therefore he did not drop the atomic bomb.
Devotee: Yes, I agree.
Prabhupāda: Your Truman dropped . . . He [Hitler] hesitated, therefore I don't believe that he killed so many Jews in concentration camps.
Devotee: But actually Hitler he was trying to invent the atom bomb . . . the Americans invented it before the Nazis did.
Prabhupāda: No, no the Americans stolen.

Svarūpa Dāmodara: The German, Germans invented the atomic. The Germans first.

Devotee: (indistinct) . . . they had the plan but they could not invent it.

Prabhupāda: No what they drop, dropped in Japan that was German.

(Morning Walk, Berkeley, 8 Oct 1972)

This informal exchange is instructive. Germany never came close to producing an atomic bomb and therefore Hitler could not have "hesitated" to drop one. This inaccurate narrative might have generated Srila Prabhupada's conditional appreciation for Hitler ("He is a good man"). Srila Prabhupada believed that Hitler had the bomb but refrained from dropping it due to moral scruples - a sign of decency - therefore Srila Prabhupada also questioned the official reports on the scope of the extermination of Jews (without offering any alternative estimate). The question if Hitler was a good or a bad man came up in correspondence less than a month later, as a disciple asked about it, among other queries. Did the disciple hear about Srila Prabhupada's remark from the morning walk the month before and was confused by it? We don't know, but here is what Srila Prabhupada replied: "It appears that you are again constantly disturbed by the same nonsense doubts. These things are not very important, we may not waste our time with these insignificant questions. If we are seeking to find out some fault, maya will give us all facility to find any small thing and make it very big, that is maya. But such questions as yours: why there is so-called discrepancy between the

views of Bhagavat and modern scientists regarding the moon and other planets, and whether Hitler is good or bad man, these are most insignificant matters, and for anyone who is sincerely convinced that Krishna is the Supreme Personality of Godhead, for him these questions do not arise." Srila Prabhupada goes on explaining about Vedic epistemology and Krishna's omniscience, and then concedes, "because you have asked me, I am your spiritual master, I must try to answer to your satisfaction." After elaborating on astronomical and cosmological matters, he comes to Hitler: "Regarding Hitler, so Hitler may be good man or bad man, so what does he help to our Krishna Consciousness movement? But it is a fact that much propaganda was made against him, that much I know, and the Britishers are first-class propagandists. And I have heard that his officers did everything without informing him, just like in our ISKCON there are so many false things: 'Prabhupada said this, Prabhupada said that.' But we have nothing to do with Hitler in our Krishna Consciousness." (Letter to Krsnadasa, 7 Nov 1972) It's noteworthy that Srila Prabhupada didn't confirm his casual remark made during a stroll a month before ("He is a good man") and instead dismisses the whole issue as "most insignificant." He wasn't committed to defend or eulogize

Hitler. The letter also sheds light on why Srila Prabhupada doubted the official accounts: he distrusted the British propaganda machine. Much of what he had heard in his youth and adult life about Hitler's wickedness came filtered through the British information apparatus. Srila Prabhupada, suspecting propagandistic foul play, took the attacks on Hitler with a grain of salt, giving him the benefit of the doubt: did Hitler really know about all the Nazi brutalities, or was he kept in the dark by his lieutenants? These are crucial considerations if we wish to understand Srila Prabhupada's attitudes within the historical context - and not as isolated, disembodied statements. His occasional lenient assessment of Hitler was influenced by Srila Prabhupada's deep suspicion of British-operated communications:

Prabhupāda: These English people, they were very expert in making propaganda. They killed Hitler by propaganda. I don't think Hitler was so bad man. What do you think? (laughs) You are Englishman. (laughter)

Hari-śauri: I can... (laughs) Just from hearing you speak in the last few months I can understand that the whole history that I was ever presented in school is completely warped around to the way that the English saw it.

(Conversation, Toronto, 17 June 1976)

The old proverb "the enemy of my enemy is my friend" appears relevant in hypothesizing why Srila Prabhupada resisted totally condemning Hitler. Srila Prabhupada grew up as a subject of the British crown; in youth he developed nationalist and anti-British feelings, and, according to him, "Germany is the bitterest enemy of Britain." (Morning Walk, Bombay, 4 May 1974) It may have been subtly gratifying, and somewhat endearing, to finally see someone boldly standing up to the mighty British empire, the invaders of India: "The [British] Prime Minister was Mr. Chamberlain. And he went to see Hitler to stop the war. But he would not." (Lecture on Bg 2.6, London, 6 Aug 1973) Srila Prabhupada also credited India's independence to Hitler: "I say that India got independence not due to Gandhi. It is due to Hitler. That is my opinion." (Morning Walk, Los Angeles, 10 June 1976). Two days earlier Srila Prabhupada had spoken on how close he had been to one of the protagonists of the Indian resistance, Subhas Chandra Bose.

Subhas Chandra Bose shaking hands with Hitler in Germany, 27 May 1942.

Prabhupāda: Hitler one side, fought with the Britishers, smashed them. This is one cause. Another cause: Hitler helped Subhas Chandra Bose to organize I.N.A. [Indian National Army] Two causes, the Britishers to go away. Otherwise, Gandhi's noncooperation movement was started in 1917, and we got our independence in 1947.
Indian man: Thirty years.
Prabhupāda: Thirty years he could not do anything. And Subhas Chandra Bose in 1940 or '42, he went out of India and organized this I.N.A with the help of Hitler, and the Britishers were obliged to leave India . . . And Hitler not only helped Subhas Chandra Bose to organize this I.N.A.

organization, but by fighting with the Britishers, he smashed... the British lion was bandaged. There was a cartoon picture. I've seen in that way. The lion is lying down and bandaged, (makes some gestures) here and here and here, there, patched, British lion. (laughter) That's a fact.

Indian man: Subhas Chandra Bose, he was in, I think he was . . .

Prabhupāda: He was my college friend. We studied in the same college.

Indian man: Is that right?

Prabhupāda: He was one-year senior to me. He appeared from the year 1919, I appeared in 1920.

(Conversation, Los Angeles, 8 June 1976)

Srila Prabhupada apparently relished witnessing Germany bringing the British empire to its knees. He also presumably enjoyed Hitler's maligning the mercantile focus of Great Britain: "Hitler used to say, 'shopkeepers' nation.'" (Lecture on SB 1.1.2, London, 15 Aug 1971) It seems Srila Prabhupada savored Hitler's weakening of the British power and the ultimate demise of the British empire, whose abuses and atrocities Srila Prabhupada had

witnessed, his indignation palpable in the following exchange:

Prabhupāda: Their administration was excellent, undoubtedly, British administration . . . But their crooked policy ruined them. Otherwise, good administrator, good politician, good diplomat . . . everything good. Simply heart was not very good.

Puṣṭa Kṛṣṇa: Heart.

Prabhupāda: "Only for Englishmen," "Only for Englishmen" . . . That is not good. When one takes shelter of you, you must give him proper protection. That liberality is not there.

Puṣṭa Kṛṣṇa: They would make the people dependent upon them and then exploit them, yes?

Prabhupāda: Yes. That is their fault. Exploitation was their policy . . . A small country, and bring money from the whole world—this is their bad policy . . .

Puṣṭa Kṛṣṇa: It was actually amazing to think how they colonized almost...

Prabhupāda: They were obliged to do that. In the country there is no food, no shelter, nothing. Therefore Hitler's determination was, "I shall make this shopkeeper nation

again fishers." What is called? Fishermen. "I shall ruin their empire." So he did it. But he also became ruined. He did it. He ruined the Englishmen, but he also became ruined, finished, Germany finished. But Germany will be able to rise again. Englishmen will not be able to.

Puṣṭa Kṛṣṇa: Why is that, Prabhupāda?

Prabhupāda: They committed so many sinful activities, yes, for maintaining their empire. To sell their Manchester-made cloth they ruined the cloth industry of India and cut this finger.

Puṣṭa Kṛṣṇa: Cut the thumb off.

Prabhupāda: Yes. Thumbs of the weavers, so that they cannot manufacture anymore.

Puṣṭa Kṛṣṇa: Very bad.

Prabhupāda: There are so many other things.

Harikeśa: They cut the thumbs of the weavers?

Prabhupāda: Yes.

Puṣṭa Kṛṣṇa: Yes. They were making finer cloth by hand than the British were making by machines. So in order to discourage, they would cut off the thumb so they couldn't weave.

Prabhupāda: So many things.

(Morning Walk, Durban 6 Oct 1975)

The "so many things" include: "The Britishers, British time, I have seen, in the village they will let loose the soldiers to rape anyone." (Conversation, Hyderabad, 22 Aug 1976) And during the Bengal famine orchestrated by the colonial government, Srila Prabhupada had directly experienced another facet of British cunning and cruelty: "In 1942 I have seen when war was going on, so these Britishers wanted soldiers, so they created artificial famine. The people became in need of money, so they enrolled them as soldiers." (Conversation, Los Angeles, 10 June

The 1943-1944 Bengal famine caused an estimated 2.1 to 3.8 million deaths

1976) "In 1942 there was a manufactured famine in Bengal by the manipulation of the then government . . . rice all of a sudden rose . . . Now, just imagine if something, the price of something, is raised from 75 cent to ten dollars, how difficult it becomes for the public, for general mass of people. So, so many people were in difficulty, and so many people died for want of food—diseases, famine." (Lecture on Bg 3.8-13, New York, 20 May 1966)

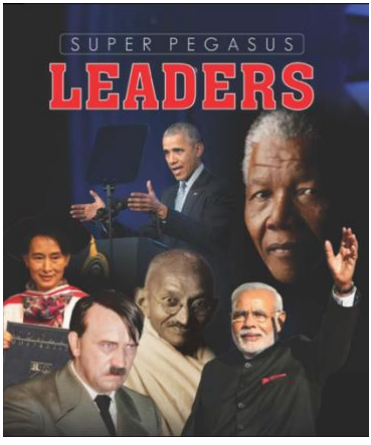
Besides their socio-economic machinations, the British had belittled and vilified the Indian traditional heritage, while the Germans tended to respect it: "The Germans, they very much praised Indian culture." (Morning Walk, Honolulu, 16 June 1975) The British stance was different: "Britishers made propaganda . . . that India had no culture, almost uncivilized . . . 'India was uncivilized, and we are making them civilized. By our compassion for the uncivilized persons, we are occupying.'" (Conversation, Toronto, 17 June 1976) Srila Prabhupada had observed how the British stealthily corrupted Indian culture: "In India also there was no slaughterhouse. The Britishers started it for their military men. The Britishers, they peacefully killed the Vedic culture." (Conversation, Honolulu, 16 June 1975) In contrast, Srila Prabhupada

acknowledged Hitler's personal interest: "Hitler was a great student of *Bhagavad-gītā*." (Lecture on Bg 2.7-11, New York, 2 March 1966) Hitler - in his own weird, twisted way - showed appreciation for the Vedic heritage, for instance by adopting the svastika as the Nazi emblem. "Hitler was too much fond of Vedic civilization he therefore marked his flag svastika. Why mark is there? That is appreciation." (Morning Walk, Los Angeles, 18 Sept 1972) In conclusion, Srila Prabhupada openly denounced Hitler as an *asura* (a demon) and a rascal. On rare occasions, Srila Prabhupada appeared to slightly soften his judgment, granting Hitler a limited degree of humane merit. This was presumably due to: 1. having received fictitious accounts on Hitler having the atomic bomb but refusing to drop it; 2. Srila Prabhupada's deep distrust of the British propaganda machine; 3. Hitler's respect for Indian culture; 4. Hitler's role in the Britishers' political, economic and military decline; 5. Hitler's involvement in the fight for Indian independence; 5. Srila Prabhupada's doubting Hitler's awareness of his lieutenants' vicious deeds. In spite of these considerations, even Srila Prabhupada's mild and circumstantial approval of Hitler could remain baffling. How to explain it? One way is to see that Srila Prabhupada, despite his extremely negative

overall evaluation of Hitler, perceived some positive aspects in him, just as Srila Prabhupada recognized some positive characteristic in Jarasandha, a card-carrying asura, a great demon who many times fought against Krishna: "Formerly there were kings like Jarāsandha who strictly followed the Vedic rituals, acted as charitable, competent *kṣatriyas*, possessed all *kṣatriya* qualities and were even obedient to the brahminical culture." (Cc, *Adi-lila*, 8.9, purport) Obviously, Hitler was in a different category - he wasn't following "Vedic rituals" and he was far from being "competent" as a ruler (he totally wrecked Germany and a large portion of Europe), and certainly he wasn't "obedient to the brahminical culture" - nonetheless, despite Hitler being a disastrous human being, Srila Prabhupada saw in him a glimpse of goodness - based on what he had heard and on his suspicion of British partisan portrayals.

Besides the above considerations, I invite you to explore the odd, perplexing relationship that India had and has with Hitler. While in the rest of the world often Hitler embodies the apex of iniquity and represents the very icon of evil, a large percentage of Indians sees him much more positively. *Mein Kampf*, his autobiography, sell thousands of copies every month and over a dozen Indian publishers

have it on the market. From *The Times of India*: "In many developed countries, like France and Austria, displaying Nazi memorabilia is a punishable offence. Not in India, where Hitler has always been a fascinating figure. Historians attribute this to ignorance about the Third Reich, and Indians' physical and emotional disconnect from the Holocaust."[16] In 2018, the New York Times reported: "Dilip D'Souza, an Indian journalist, wrote in a 2012 editorial that when 25 mostly upper-middle-class students . . . in Mumbai were asked to name the historical figure they most admired, nine of them picked Hitler."[17] (Only one chose Gandhi.) The same article speaks of the Delhi-based publisher who included Hitler in a children's book about leaders who "devoted their lives for the betterment of their country and people."



[16] https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/why-hitler-is-not-a-dirty-word-in-india/articleshow/63955029.cms
[17] https://www.nytimes.com/2018/03/17/world/asia/india-hitler-childrens-book.html

The cover features Gandhi, Mandela, Obama, Aung San Suu Kyi and Modi. And Hitler. In most places this may sound inconceivable, but it happens in India.

The Jews and... the Irish?!

Besides what he said about Hitler, Srila Prabhupada made a few rare remarks about Jews that have been taken as antisemitic. We can't deny that some of such generalizations are denigratory in nature. It's therefore important that, approaching this category of oversimplified statements, we remind ourselves of Srila Prabhupada's communication style, which often employed sweeping and hyperbolic characterizations of individuals, groups, classes, races, entire countries or even the whole humanity: "All the people of the world, they are rascals and fools." (Lecture on Bg 2.26, Los Angeles, 6 Dec 1968). "Any philosopher, any scientist comes, I can say that, 'You are simply creating fools and rascals, because you are also fools and rascals.'" (Conversation, Sydney, 2 April 1972) "Modern age means all rascals and fools." (Morning Walk, Perth, 10 May 1975). Noteworthily, in some cases he included himself within such labels: "In this age we are all fools and rascals." (Sannyasa initiation lecture, Vrindavana,

6 Dec 1975) Within his unrestricted, 360 degrees bashing, when Srila Prabhupada highlights certain idiosyncrasies commonly associated with certain groups it shouldn't be taken as particularly discriminatory. So, any apparent racial slur should be taken within this broad framework of disapproval and criticism, founded on attacking the fundamental mistake of identifying one's real self with temporary cultural and physical constructs:

Prabhupāda: Everyone is fool, *mūḍha*. Everyone within this material world is supposed to be a fool, because everyone is thinking, "I am this body." So he's fool. "I am Indian," "I am American," "I am German," "I am Frenchman," "I am this," "I am that" . . . "black," "white." So everyone is fool. Is it not? Yes. He's thinking in a way what he is not. Therefore he's a fool . . .

Yogeśvara: In the United States, there are something called minority groups. Minority group means like the Irish or the Negroes, the Jews . . .

Prabhupāda: They're also fools. Minority fools. They're minority fools.

Yogeśvara: Minority fools?

Prabhupāda: Yes. Because he's thinking, "I am Irishman."

(Morning Walk, Paris, 11 June 1974)

Talking with the Irish poet Desmond O'Grady, Srila Prabhupada expresses a generalization (which, by the way, O'Grady endorses):

Desmond O'Grady: Maybe you can give me some advice how to beat the system . . .

Prabhupāda: You Irish people, you are never tired to fight. (laughter)

Desmond O'Grady: No. We've been fighting for three thousand years now.

(Conversation, Rome, 23 May 1974)

By definition, generalizations aren't universally true (there must be Irish people with a peaceful disposition, who are not inclined to fight). Someone may choose a hardline posture, "No, no, he said that and that's literally incorrect and therefore he is a racist again the Irish!" But that would be intellectually illegitimate. There are indeed certain traits that are commonly encountered in particular ethnic groups and nationalities, even if mentioning them is never totally accurate or absolute. Coming to Jews, their characterization as a community proficient in economic development can be supported historically and statistically. Jews are (generally) good at gaining wealth.

According to Wikipedia: "Jews typically rank as the highest income groups in the United States . . . According to a 2014 study by the Pew Research Center, Jewish again ranked as the most financially successful religious group in the United States, with 44% of Jews living in households with incomes of at least $100,000." There is nothing wrong about recognizing it as a general datum - although it's a feature that traditionally has attracted envy and hostility (from economically less talented groups). In fact, the Vedic categorization includes the wealth-producing sector within the higher groups, the *dvijas*, the "twice-born." So, Srila Prabhupada is not saying anything particularly demeaning or inappropriate when he says:

Prabhupāda: The Jews are *vaiśyas*. (laughter)
Rāmeśvara: The Jews are *vaiśyas*.
Tamāla Kṛṣṇa: That's why they call them the American Marwaris.
Prabhupāda: (laughs) Yes. They know how to do business and earn money.
Tamāla Kṛṣṇa: A lot of your disciples are Jewish.
Prabhupāda: Yes. Therefore they know how to make money.
(Morning Walk, New York, 18 July 1976)

When not sustained by spiritual culture, *any* mercantile community can turn acquisitive or even heartless. Srila Prabhupada's following informal comment can't be taken literally, as certainly many Jews have great interest in religion and donate profusely for noble causes. The statement does reflect certain clichés he had acquired as part of his embodied life (and, interestingly, we can perceive another element of British influence in the Shakespeare citation):

Rāmeśvara: It's also commonly known that in the West the banks supplied money to Lenin to fight his revolution. They have no discrimination. If it seems like it is a good chance for making interest . . .

Prabhupāda: Therefore Hitler killed these Jews. They were financing against Germany. Otherwise he had no enmity with the Jews.

Hari-śauri: Yes. They were controlling the economy. That was his one thing.

Prabhupāda: And they were supplying. They want interest money—"Never mind against our country." Therefore Hitler decided, "Kill all the Jews."

Rāmeśvara: These banks in the West, they supported Lenin. They made it possible to finance his revolution.

Prabhupāda: Yes. They have got money. The Jews have got money. They want to invest and get some profit. Their only interest is how to get money—no nationalism, no religion, nothing of the sort. Therefore... it is not now, long, long ago. Therefore Shakespeare wrote, "Shylock the Jew."

Hari-śauri: Yes. "Shylock."

Prabhupāda: "One pound of flesh." The Jews were criticized long, long ago.

(Conversation, Bhubaneswar, 23 Jan 1977)

We wonder how much of such characterizations was generated by personal experience dealing with Jewish people (little or none, I surmise) and how much was absorbed by cultural influences, such as the Shakespearean quotation above. ISKCON should recognize the danger of such assertions and negative generalizations - which are technically antisemitic in nature - and firmly distance itself from them. We could openly say, for instance, that we don't believe that the Jews' "only interest is how to get money—no nationalism, no religion" - because that's not a fact. It would be irrational, for instance, to maintain that none of the seven million Jews living in Israel harbors

nationalistic feelings. It's also understandable that because of the Jewish diaspora - the dispersion of Israelites out of their ancestral homeland and their settlement in other places - many Jews may still feel somewhat as exiles, strangers in their current countries. They may maintain strong cultural ties with their place of origin and nurture a less intense sense of identity with and attachment for their present host nations. As far as religion, according a 2013 Pew Forum survey, in the US "About eight-in-ten Orthodox Jews say religion is very important to them, which is on par with white evangelical Protestants (86%) and black Protestants (89%)."[18] According to the same study: "Orthodox Jews . . . attend religious services at least as often as the most religiously committed Christian groups. Roughly three-quarters of Orthodox Jews (74%) say they attend religious services at least monthly, on par with white evangelical Protestants (75%) and black Protestants (71%)." Saying that *all* Jewish people don't care about religion is therefore plainly inaccurate. We should be careful not to embrace or repeat such informal statements. At any rate, one thing that should be clear is that Srila Prabhupada never supported or condoned the

[18] https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2013/10/01/chapter-4-religious-beliefs-and-practices/

killing of Jews. Describing Hitler's wicked, genocidal motivations doesn't mean defending them:

Prabhupāda: It is not crime to kill an animal? . . .

Śyāmasundara: Their idea is that the animal is not in the same category as myself . . .

Prabhupāda: So that's alright; then might is right? Hitler is right? When Hitler, Hitler kills the Jews, he's right? He thinks that they are not in my category.
(Philosophy Discussion on Hegel)

We should also recognize that Srila Prabhupada spoke positively about Jews as well:

Dr. Patel: This race is very bold, indeed, that God's choicest race, these Jews, somehow or other.
Prabhupāda: Jews?
Dr. Patel: Really, it is God's choicest race. (laughter) They have produced wonderful people, right from Christ up to Professor Einstein . . . Very brave. It is the choicest race from God. It's a fact.

Prabhupāda: Brahmānanda is very much pleased. (laughter) . . . [Brahmānanda was of Jewish origins]

Dr. Patel: Historically we look back, they are really very brave people . . .

Prabhupāda: And they are greatest scientist.

(Morning Walk, Bombay, 20 Nov 1975)

So, Srila Prabhupada casually repeating a racial cliché doesn't make him an antisemite. Why would he accept so many disciples from Jewish background - and often give them responsible positions - if he didn't like Jews?

Color & Culture

Being fair skinned has been commonly considered a sign of wealth and high parentage in Asian countries blessed with abundant sunlight. It's taken as a sign that the person doesn't have to work in the hot sun as a farmhand, as a construction worker or as a fisherman. Social groups dedicated to less physical work are generally better educated and are considered more high-class. Unfortunately, often modern Indians don't care about being high-class but only about *looking* high-class. Neglecting the real essence, the refined, purificatory aspects, many obsess over the fairness of their skin. (They also remain gripped in their strange conception of pale complexion as synonymous with beauty...) This is tragically widespread, with the industry of fairness

products fanning the flames of the craze with aggressive and misleading advertising. According to Nielsen Retail Measurement Services, the fairness market in India is worth some 5,800 crores - about 774 billion US dollars - and growing every year, according to a study, at the rate of 18% for women and 6-8% for men. Products include face moisturizers, hand and body lotions, face cleansers and bleaches. This humongous preoccupation with skin tone causes massive and unjustified discrimination, a titanic sense of inadequacy, stinging insecurity and painful depression. I have personally experienced the surprise and disbelief among my Indian friends when I tell them that in Italy - and in other Western countries - people spend considerable amounts of time and money to darken their skin, to tan. Some Indian find the notion almost inconceivable, absorbed as they are in their epic but unjustified battles against concentrated melanin.

Back to Srila Prabhupada: some people have arbitrarily interpreted a particular *Bhagavatam* purport as indicative of racial prejudice: "It is said in the *śāstras* that the head of the body represents the *brāhmaṇas,* the arms represent the *kṣatriyas,* the abdomen represents the *vaiśyas,* and the legs, beginning with the thighs, represent the *śūdras.* The *śūdras*

are sometimes called black, or *kṛṣṇa.* The *brāhmaṇas* are called *śukla,* or white, and the *kṣatriyas* and the *vaiśyas* are a mixture of black and white . . . It may be concluded that white or a golden hue is the color of the higher caste, and black is the complexion of the *śūdras.*" (SB 4.14.45, purport) Srila Prabhupada is talking about pigmentation shading among members of the *same race*, of the same ethnic group. If Srila Prabhupada is describing *social classes* within the *same race* - how can anyone accuse him of "racism"? Plus, his usage of a tentative expression - "It may be concluded" - seems to indicate that he wasn't taking this categorization too seriously. Yes, he did repeat a common generalization - something he did also in at least another instance: "The black man means *śūdra.* The *brāhmaṇa, kṣatriya, vaiśya*, they were not black. But the *śūdras* were black. From external point of view, these things are there. *Śūdras*, another name is *kṛṣṇa. Kṛṣṇa* means black." (Lecture on SB 1.16.4, Los Angeles, 1 Jan 1974) He was comfortable saying those things - now considered incendiary - because such considerations were accepted, acceptable and directly experienced. Previously people weren't bent out of shape by the idea that there are different social classes with (generally) different skin tones. It's a fact that someone from a family who, for generations,

worked in an office, tend to be lighter in color than, say, someone from a family of construction workers and fishermen, who spend a lot of time in direct sunlight. It's not Srila Prabhupada's fault. It's an empirical observation. He also clarifies: "From external point of view, these things are there." Srila Prabhupada is the one who taught the whole world *not* to think in terms of skin color, the fact that he mentioned skin color (as an "external" but verifiable consideration) doesn't change his fundamental, central message: "*Ātmā* means self, and *vit* means one who knows, well aware of self-realization . . . Hardly you will find a person at the present moment *ātmavit*, self-realized. Everyone is, 'I am this body.' 'I am Indian,' 'I am American,' 'I am Canadian,' 'I am Australian,' 'I am white,' 'I am black,' 'I am *brāhmaṇa*,' 'I am *śūdra,'* this way—'I am this body.' *Ātmavit* means 'I am the self; I am the soul.' *Ahaṁ brahmāsmi* . . . A dog thinks that he is the body . . . But at the present moment, so many big, big scholars and professors and educationists, they are also the same category as the dog. As the dog is thinking, 'I am this body,' he is also thinking, 'I am this body.'" (Lecture on SB 2.1.1-5, Melbourne, 26 June 1974)

Everyone Can Become High Class

If we forget this vital message - we are not these bodies - we miss the point completely. We start imagining a fictional Srila Prabhupada; one overly concerned with externals such as skin; a Srila Prabhupada that doesn't exist. Yes, his way of expressing the "facts of life" (such as that in Asia menial workers generally have a darker complexion than richer classes) may raise a few eyebrows among contemporary readers; but that doesn't change the fact that it's a factual observation. In another circumstance, for instance, Srila Prabhupada clarified that he didn't take this melanin-based categorization too seriously; he also stressed that the real aspects of being high class are "behavior" and "culture," not just skin color: "In India, it was, one from the higher section, *brāhmaṇa, kṣatriya, vaiśya,* they will be fair complexion. *Śūdras*, black. So if a *brāhmaṇa* becomes black, then he's not accepted as *brāhmaṇa*. *Kāla-bahu*. And if a *śūdra* becomes fair, then he's to be known, understood, that he's not pure *śūdra*. Although we do not take very... but this *brāhmin, kṣatriya, vaiśya* by birth, but still, we have seen, those who are coming purely from high caste family, their behavior and *śūdras* behavior, different. The family culture." (Room

Conversation, Nouvelle Mayapur, France, 2 Aug 1976) Culture - especially in the Sanskrit sense of *saṁskṛti*, elevated, purified behavior - refers to levels of cleanliness, subtlety and virtue in thought, speech and action; for instance, what one eats, the decorum of one's dress, or the decency of one's vocabulary. It also indicates one's level of familiarity and alignment with God's commandments. As such, the classes are interchangeable, depending on the behavior and consciousness of individuals: "*Muci* means cobbler, dealing with skin. 'I am this skin.' 'I am white skin,' 'I am black skin,' 'I am American skin,' 'I am Indian skin'—this understanding means *muci.* [unclean, impure] . . . And *śuci* means *brāhmaṇa*, pure . . . *Muci haya śuci haya, yadi kṛṣṇa bhaje.* If one becomes Kṛṣṇa conscious, then from the platform of becoming a *muci,* one becomes *śuci* [clean, pure]. Therefore we have no caste distinction, because our process is to elevate the *muci* to the platform of *śuci,* this Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement . . . One can be trained up to become a *śuci* from the platform of *muci.* And even though one is born of a *śuci* family, if by practice he is not Kṛṣṇa conscious, then he automatically becomes a *muci . . . śuci haya muci haya yadi kṛṣṇa tyaje*: if one gives up Kṛṣṇa consciousness, even though he is born in a *brāhmin* family, he becomes a cobbler. Because he

considers only the skin. Cobbler's business is to test the skin, tannery. So if anyone is interested in the skin, he is no better than cobbler." (Lecture on SB 6.1.56.57, Bombay, 14 Aug 1975) Srila Prabhupada fully exhibited his dictum "we have no caste distinction" by practically welcoming anyone, from any background, in his International Society for Krishna Consciousness. He fully demonstrated his belief that, "One can be trained up to become a *śuci* from the platform of *muci*" by coaching thousands in purified life and promoting a process that anyone, in any culture, can adopt and be elevated to the highest platform.

In these times of rampant moral relativism, we often encounter the tendency to consider any aspect of any given culture - such as, say, eating habits - in a non-judgmental, neutral fashion. People victimized by the idea that there is no absolute or universal value system despise rigorous judgments and resist classifications of good and bad; of higher and lower. But the Vedic revelation, being much more scientific than contemporary, speculative hodge-podge, clearly delineates what elevates and what degrades. Srila Prabhupada, as representative of that tradition, simultaneously boldly condemned the debasing

behaviors while also, with the same boldness, always welcomed *everyone* to the saintly life: "These processes, the ways and means, all are stated in the *Bhagavad-gītā*, and there is no bar for anyone. It is not that a particular class of men can approach. Thinking of Lord Kṛṣṇa is possible: hearing of Lord Kṛṣṇa is possible by everyone. And the Lord says in the *Bhagavad-gītā* [9.32]:

māṁ hi pārtha vyapāśritya
ye 'pi syuḥ pāpa-yonayaḥ
striyo śūdrās tathā vaiśyās
te 'pi yānti parāṁ gatim

. . . The Lord says that even a human being in the lowest status of life . . . anyone, it does not matter who is he, or who she is—anyone who accepts this principle of *bhakti-yoga* and accepts the Supreme Lord as the summum bonum of life, the highest target, highest goal of life . . . everyone can approach. Simply one has to practice the system." (Lecture on *Bhagavad-gita* Introduction, New York, 19 Feb 1966) Ultimately true high-classness depends on one's proximity to God - the supreme pure, the supreme purifier - and not on the shade of one's

pigmentation. On this Srila Prabhupada has always been absolutely clear.

African Kirātas

People with similar karmic inclinations tend to take birth in the same place. Once born, the family culture and the community customs cement a certain collective mentality. And this was especially applicable before the world, through technologically advanced communication, became a global village. Today you could probably easily find, say, a Canadian teenager of Sri Lankan origin who is a fan of Korean pop music, who often eats Italian food, who roots for an English football club and who drinks Mexican tequila while wearing clothes designed in France. Nowadays, cultural mix-and-match is the norm instead of the exception, but just a few hundred years ago the world was much more compartmentalized in terms of how people would look, eat, dress, think, practice religion, etc. Once Srila Prabhupada appeared to make a generalization about Africa as a place designated for human beings with honesty issues. The passage, I believe, requires serious analysis. The occasion: we are in Bombay (present-day Mumbai), and Srila Prabhupada is awarding a disciple the

order of renunciation, *sannyasa*; and he is sending him to propagate Krishna consciousness in Africa - that's why the continent comes into focus: "You are going to Africa to deliver these persons. Śukadeva Gosvāmī says, *kirāta-hūṇāndhra-pulinda-pulkaśā ābhīra-śumbhā yavanāḥ khasādayaḥ, ye 'nye ca pāpā* [SB 2.4.18]. These groups of men are considered very fallen, *Kirāta*, the black men. They are called *Niṣāda*. *Niṣāda* was born of Vena, King Vena. So they are habituated to steal; therefore they have been given a separate place, African jungles. That is there in the *Bhāgavatam*. So... but everyone can be delivered. *Kirāta-hūṇāndhra-pulinda-pulkaśā ābhīra-śumbhā yavanāḥ khasādayaḥ ye 'nye ca pāpā*. These are known as sinful life. But Śukadeva Gosvāmī says . . . 'If they take shelter of a Vaiṣṇava,' *śudhyanti*, 'they become purified' . . . Practically we have seen last time when I went to Nairobi, so many, these Africans, they are making progress very nicely. They are making nice questions. They are following rules and regulation. So African people, they are not so much sophisticated or so-called civilized to forget God . . . there is good prospect. Prospect is there for everywhere . . . Caitanya Mahāprabhu said there are as many villages and as many towns on the surface of the globe. So His word is not a trifle thing. Yes. There is potency in all the parts of

the world to become Vaiṣṇava." (Sannyasa Initiation Lecture, Bombay, 18 Nov 1975) A few considerations: Africa is a big place. Geographically and culturally, we encounter great varieties - from the Sahara Desert in the North, to jungles and savannah in other places; from tiny, remote villages to huge population centers such as Cairo or Lagos; from huge stone pyramids in Egypt, to the baked-brick Great Mosque in Djenné, in Mali, to the modern Bosjes Chapel in South Africa. Africans speaks more than 2,000 distinct languages; almost everything said about Africa must be taken as a generalization.

Srila Prabhupada appears to conflate the *Naiṣāda* and the *Kirāta* - and this is not the only time he does that: "*Kirāta* means the Africans. They are called *Niṣāda."* (Lecture on SB 3.25.20, Bombay, 20 Nov 1974) The *Bhāgavatam* describes the physical characteristics of Niṣāda (or Bāhuka), "the father of the *Naiṣāda* race": "his complexion was as black as a crow's. All the limbs of his body were very short, his arms and legs were short, and his jaws were large. His nose was flat, his eyes were reddish, and his hair copper-colored." (SB 4.14.44-45) Here we have the description of a dwarf; we might be tempted to see in him an ancestor of the African pygmies, but it would be hard

to reconcile the fact that although pygmies are short, their limbs are proportionate, the size of their arms and legs in balance with the rest of the body. Another striking peculiarity is the "copper-colored" hair (*tāmra-mūrdhajaḥ*), which is not a common feature in Africa. Red hair in Africans is usually caused by rufous albinism, a rare type of oculocutaneous albinism. We find the occasional redheads among the Berber populations of Morocco and northern Algeria, but Berbers are not Black Africans. The last consideration is that the *Bhāgavatam* appears quite specific on *Naiṣāda*'s skin color: "black as a crow's" (*kāka-kṛṣṇo*) and certainly most Africans aren't that dark. *Wikipedia* describes the *Niṣāda* as "a tribe mentioned in ancient Indian literature (such as the epic *Mahabharata*). The ancient texts mention several kingdoms ruled by this tribe. In the Mahabharata, the Nishada are described as tribes that have the hills and the forests [as] their abode . . . In what appears to be an attempt to define the status of the Nishadas in the varna system, several ancient texts present them as progeny of parents from different varnas . . . Multiple sources describe the Nishadas as the children of Brahmana men and their Shudra wives. These texts include *Baudhayana Dharmasutra, Arthashastra, Vashistha Dharmasutra, Manusmriti, Yajnavalkya Smriti,* and the

Anushasana Parva (48.5) of *Mahabharata*." [19] Srila Prabhupada confirms this last point and expands on it: "In the *Manu-saṁhitā* the following names are given. A son begotten by a *brāhmaṇa* and born from the womb of a *śūdra* mother is called a *pāraśava* or *niṣāda,* a hunter accustomed to stealing. A son begotten by a *niṣāda* in the womb of a *śūdra* woman is called a *pukkasa*." (SB 6.13.8-9, purport) The Wikipedia entry, although quite detailed, doesn't say anything about Niṣāda in Africa. In its article on the Kirāta, *Wikipedia* says that they were "slightly different from the Nishadas" and that they are "first mentioned in the Yajurveda (*Shukla* XXX.16; *Krishna* III.4,12,1), and in the Atharvaveda (X.4,14). According to Suniti Kumar Chatterji, the name *Kirata* seems to be used for any non-Aryan aboriginal hill-folk . . . Ancient Indian texts gives an indication of their geographical position. In the Mahabharata, Bhima meets the Kiratas to the east of Videha, [present-day northeastern Bihar and parts of Nepal] where his son Ghatotkacha is born; and in general, the dwellers of the Himalayas, especially the eastern Himalayas, were called Kiratas. In general they are mentioned as 'gold-like', or yellow, unlike the Nishadas." [20]

[19] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nishadas
[20] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kirata

Again, no mention of Africa. Srila Prabhupada himself makes no mention of Africa when describing the Kirātas in his purport to SB 2.4.18: "*Kirāta:* A province of old Bhārata-varṣa mentioned in the *Bhīṣma parva* of *Mahābhārata.* Generally the Kirātas are known as the aboriginal tribes of India, and in modern days the Santal Parganas in Bihar and Chota Nagpur might comprise the old province named Kirāta." This may sound confusing: how groups consistently described as inhabitants of India get to be designated as Africans? It seems that Srila Prabhupada used the term Kirāta also as an umbrella term for forest dwellers anywhere in the world: "*Kirāta* means... generally they are called aborigines, or the very black aborigines living in the jungles, they are called *Kirāta.*" (Initiation Lecture, Montreal, 24 July 1968) Srila Prabhupada didn't reserve the term *Kirāta* for a specific group in a particular nation or continent. There are forest dwellers in India; in the Brazilian Amazonas; in the Malaysian Borneo; and in so many other places. "*Kirāta;* generally, those who are living in the jungles." (Lecture at Andhra College, Visakhapatnam, 21 Feb 1972) Although only a tiny percentage of Africans live in jungles, Srila Prabhupada sometimes generalizes all Africans as Kirāta:

"*Kirāta* means the Africans." (Bombay, Lecture on SB 1.2.6, Bombay, 26 March 1972)

Demoniac Hunters?

Even more sensitive or even volatile is the ethical dimension Srila Prabhupada attributes to jungle dwellers, their birth taken as a symptom of sinful, asuric and anti-social attitudes. "In the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, Third Canto," he writes, "it is stated that an individual soul, after his death, is put into the womb of a mother where he gets a particular type of body under the supervision of superior power . . . The many kinds of hunters in the jungle are considered to belong to the demoniac species of life." (Bg 16.19, purport) This may appear as racism in its purest form, in which moral attributes are ascribed to entire ethnic groups; but let's think it through: remote forest dwellers hardly get opportunities for systematic spiritual or religious training. It's very difficult for them to come in touch with saintly teachers - of any tradition. Many forest tribes don't have written languages, and so access to religious texts (of any kind) is problematic for them. If they don't practice agriculture, they are practically forced to kill and eat animals. In the overall scheme of human

karma such a birth cannot be considered a favorable platform for elevation. Vedic philosophy teaches that our present comes from our past. If this disadvantaged situation is their destiny, it probably means that they must have done something questionable in previous lives. Nonetheless, Srila Prabhupada doesn't propose abandoning them to their spiritually grim circumstances. Together with his scathing characterizations, he speaks words of hope and emphasizes their potential for emancipation: "Our business is to create Vaiṣṇavas in amongst the demons . . . *Asura* can also be taught. *Kirāta-hūṇāndhra-pulinda-pulkaśā ābhīra-śumbhā yavanāḥ khasādayaḥ* [SB 2.4.18]. These are *asuras*, very lowborn, less than the *śūdrās . . .* but they can be also reformed, *śudhyanti*. They can be reformed. That is our movement, Kṛṣṇa consciousness." (Conversation, Honolulu, 12 May 1972) In addition, Vaisnava culture strongly condemns seeing "reformed" persons, people who adopted a purified, devotional lifestyle, according to their previous status: "The *Padma Purāṇa* . . . says:

śūdraṁ vā bhagavad-bhaktaṁ niṣādaṁ śva-pacaṁ tathā
vīkṣate jāti-sāmānyāt sa yāti narakaṁ dhruvam

'One who considers a devotee of the Supreme Personality of Godhead who was born in a family of *śūdras*, *niṣādas* or *caṇḍālas* to belong to that particular caste certainly goes to hell.'" (*Cc Antya-lila*, 16.29, purport) A Vaisnava doesn't consider the present physical, psychological, social or cultural situation of a person as "the person." Someone's body, mind and environment have nothing to do with the real self, the spirit soul. In other words, when Srila Prabhupada - or other Vaisnavas - speaks pessimistically about the birth and condition of jungle dwellers (or skyscraper dwellers), his disapproval is not a definitive judgment, an unappealable condemnation. He knows that they are not their bodies or their past choices; they are not their karmic record. Yes, at present their karma may be problematic, but Srila Prabhupada trusts the power of *bhakti* to purify and elevate anyone - literally *anyone*. He sees them as objects of compassion, not of disdain. That's why he is sending his missionaries everywhere. A racist, on the other hand, takes an ethnic group he despises as an unredeemable target of loathing; he doesn't contemplate their redemption and has no desire to help.

Let's now analyze another delicate statement Srila Prabhupada made in the *sannyasa* initiation lecture quoted

before: "*Kirāta . . . Niṣāda . . .* they are habituated to steal; therefore they have been given a separate place, African jungles." (Sannyasa Initiation Lecture, Bombay, 18 Nov 1975) It could be any jungle; but here Srila Prabhupada focuses on Africa because that's where he is sending his new *sannyasi*. The traditional idea seems to be that since certain individuals and groups tend to appropriate other people's private property, Providence arranges for them to live outside urban conglomerates, so that they can't disturb the more civilized and build more negative karma. (Of course, nowadays cities are crammed with varieties of thieves; some even capturing the highest echelons of political power...) Obviously, Srila Prabhupada's words above contain a broad generalization. He is not sending his disciple to jungle tribes, but to modern African metropolises, notwithstanding Srila Prabhupada had personal experience of the locals' ambivalent relation with the belongings of others. The *Śrīla Prabhupāda-līlāmṛta* describes a 1972 incident: "In Nairobi Prabhupāda followed his usual schedule of bathing in the afternoon and then putting on fresh clothes, but one day after his bath he found that no clothes were ready. When he asked for them, Brahmānanda Swami explained that the African servant had washed them and put them on the line to dry.

But when Brahmānanda Swami had gone to get them, they hadn't been there; apparently someone had stolen them from the clothesline. Prabhupāda tolerated the inconvenience without any display of emotion. That evening, when the devotees of ISKCON Nairobi gathered in the temple to hear Prabhupāda speak from *Bhagavad-gītā,* Prabhupāda saw the different items of stolen clothing on the African boys; one boy wore the *kurtā,* another the top piece, and another the *dhotī.* Prabhupāda pointed this out to Brahmānanda Swami, who immediately took the boys out and retrieved the clothing from them. When Brahmānanda Swami returned the clothes, Prabhupāda didn't seem to take the offense seriously, but only laughed . . . Śrīla Prabhupāda installed the Deities of Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa and named the Nairobi temple *Kirāta-śuddhi*, 'a place for purifying the aborigines.'" (*Śrīla Prabhupāda-līlāmṛta,* Chapter 38)

We should take his remark on the stealing propensity of Africans as an approximative and generalized portrayal. Apparently, Srila Prabhupada was broadly describing a "continental karma," as it were. We might question: how defensible is this sweeping depiction? Do we have data indicating that thievery is comparatively more common in

Africa? To get some insight, we will look into the available data on corruption.

What Can We Learn from Corruption Statistics?

As it is conducted clandestinely, corruption remains inherently difficult to measure; nonetheless various interested parties compile different statistics. *Transparency International*, a non-governmental advocacy organization, defines corruption as the abuse of entrusted power for private gain. They annually publish a *Corruption Perceptions Index*, which ranks countries by the perceived levels of corruption in the public sector, the part of the economy controlled by the government. In its 2020 edition,[21] of the 20 most corrupt countries, 13 were African. There are 54 countries in Africa, roughly 28% of the total number of countries in the world. Had the ratio been balanced, among the 20 most corrupted we should find only 5 or 6 African countries; but 13 is more than double that. An accidental, odd coincidence? Or an indication that there is indeed a challenging continental

[21] https://tradingeconomics.com/country-list/corruption-rank

situation regarding honesty? Are the people at *Transparency International* just a bunch of racists, or are they neutrally reporting perceptions? Let's take a look at a sample report[22] on their site: "When the African Union Convention on Preventing and Combatting Corruption (AUCPCC) was adopted by the African Union Assembly in 2003, it was a huge step towards resolving the continent's serious corruption challenges. Designed as a shared roadmap for member states to implement governance and anti-corruption measures, the convention aims to eradicate corruption in government and business. Today, 44 of the 55 member states have ratified the convention, yet there is little information on how well it is implemented in practice. A new report by Transparency International[23] explores this, looking at three important areas: money laundering, illicit enrichment and political party funding . . . Money laundering facilitates heinous crimes that damage the lives of millions of Africans across the continent . . . Illicit enrichment - When government officials channel public funds into their own pockets, they

[22] https://www.transparency.org/en/news/are-african-countries-preventing-corruption
[23] https://www.transparency.org/en/publications/aucpcc-comparative-review

hinder the development of local communities and entire countries . . . many suspected offenders are high-profile and well-connected figures, who often enjoy political immunity. This often involves unduly influencing judges . . . Political party funding - When money from opaque and unregulated sources is allowed to infiltrate politics, it becomes difficult to hold politicians and their parties accountable. Lack of transparency in political party funding also allows hidden actors to finance and buy politicians for their own interests – states get captured by the corrupt."

"OK," someone may argue, "Africa is afflicted with various types of corruption, but look at India, supposedly the cradle of Vedic civilization. Your *Corruption Perceptions Index Rank* lists India in 86th place, more corrupt than Burkina Faso, Rwanda, Namibia and 12 more African countries. Botswana is more than 50 positions ahead of India! How do you justify that?"

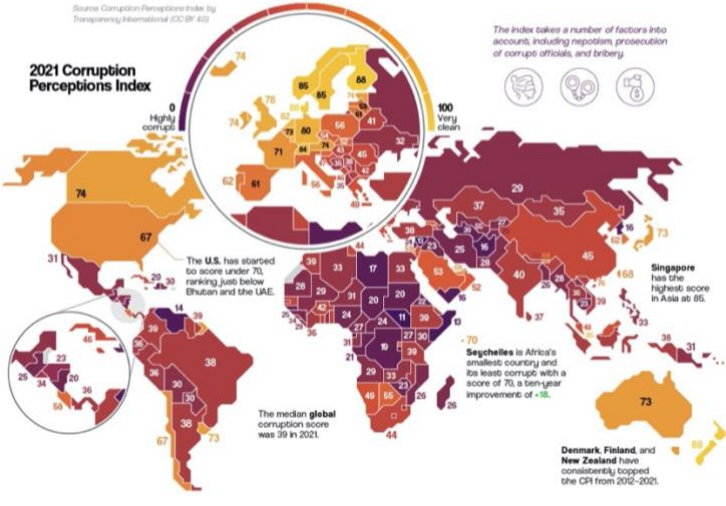
My answer: "The issue is not geographical or racial. Low-class people tend to steal due to their lack of values and the heavy influence of the lower modes. The fact that there

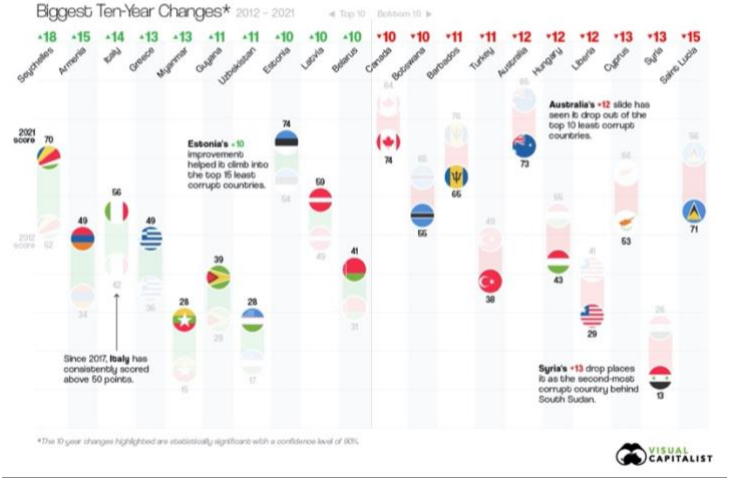
Corruption

Around the World in 2021

Which countries are the most and least corrupt, and how have they improved (or declined) over the last ten years?

The **2021 Corruption Perceptions Index** by Transparency International measures the perceived levels of public sector corruption on a scale from zero to 100.


Source: Corruption Perceptions Index by Transparency International (CC BY 4.0)
The index takes a number of factors into account, including nepotism, prosecution of corrupt officials, and bribery.
2021 Corruption Perceptions Index
0
Highly corrupt
100
Very clean
The U.S. has started to score under 70, ranking just below Bhutan and the UAE.
Singapore has the highest score in Asia at 85.
+70
Seychelles is Africa's smallest country and its least corrupt with a score of 70, a ten-year improvement of +18.
The median global corruption score was 39 in 2021.
Denmark, Finland, and New Zealand have consistently topped the CPI from 2012–2021.



is a prominence of corruption in Africa seems to be an indication that Srila Prabhupada's sweeping characterization has some substantial basis." The principle applies also in India because there - and everywhere else - selfish, ignoble people have been increasingly capturing positions of power and exploiting them. People are often manipulated to vote for unreliable representatives. in Srila Prabhupada's words: "Now the government men, they are elected by votes. People do not consider whether he's a *brāhmaṇa* or *kṣatriya* or *vaiśya* or *śūdra* . . . In the Kali-yuga everyone is a *śūdra*. Therefore naturally he will elect one *śūdra.* The *śūdra* is not fit for government management. As such, we find so many difficulties in the government because the head or the head man, they are all *śūdras*." (Lecture on SB 1.16.4, Los Angeles, 1 Jan 1974) *Śūdras* are not a *race*; but a group with certain socio-psychological traits.

"OK," someone might still argue, "that makes sense: it's not just a geographical thing; but if everyone is a *śūdra* why some countries are better than others at preventing and curbing corruption?"

My answer: "Two considerations come to mind. The first is that better educated people tend to behave as better citizens. They are less susceptible to demagoguery, and they are more equipped to deal with dishonesty in the public sphere. In countries that consistently offer quality education to *all* their citizens, people tend to make more informed choices and to demand stricter accountability from their elected representatives. The second aspect is that some nationalities have more '*kṣatriya* blood' in them. Responsible governance and honorable behavior seem to come more naturally to them, as within their ancestors some served as noble rulers." Looking again at the *Corruption Perception Index Rank*, we see that among the 20 countries with the least corruption 17 are in Europe or predominantly governed by people of European ancestry. Should we consider it a fortuitous coincidence, or should we accept that Srila Prabhupada was right in saying that Europeans (and by extension Caucasian North Americans) descend from the *kṣatriyas*? "From historical point of view you Europeans and Americans, you belong to the *kṣatriya* stock of old India." (Lecture on SB 6.1.11, New York, 25 July 1971) And, again, '*kṣatriya*' is not a race; it's a cultural and psychological designation.

"But," our observant friend continues, "among the top ranking we find countries such as Denmark, Sweden and Norway. Those citizens descend from the Vikings, and Srila Prabhupada said that Vikings were not *kṣatriyas*, they were murderers - pillaging seamen. How do you explain that descendants of homicidal pirates are less corrupt than most people in the world?"

"Sagacious observation," I would have to say, "but the quote I just cited has more to offer: 'From historical point of view you Europeans and Americans, you belong to the *kṣatriya* stock of old India, and somehow or other you have forgotten this Vedic culture. Originally you belonged to this Vedic culture.' (Lecture on SB 6.1.11, New York, 25 July 1971)" So, it would appear that Vikings - as well as other Europeans - do have *kṣatriya blood*, but, being far from their original Indian homeland for so long, being deprived of the purifying influence of *brāhmaṇas,* they degraded into murderous plunderers. In the last centuries though, people from Denmark, Sweden or Norway appear to have sobered up, presumably also due to their adoption, between the 9th and 12th centuries, of Christian practices and ethos. Nowadays you don't see Danes or Swedes crisscrossing the coasts of Europe, looting towns and

massacring people. So, what seems to be happening is that, as they cooled down, the influence of their ancient *kṣatriya* genealogy, coupled with other positive cultural influences, allowed their governments to manifest some outstanding standards of civility - compared with the abysmal performance of many other countries. The point is that genetics does have weight; genetics and training (nature and nurture).

"Are you saying," our friend keeps astutely probing, "that nations with little or no *kṣatriya* blood are doomed to bad government?"

"Yes and no," I would answer, "Without a profound transformation, yes, because degradation and depredation tend to engender a vicious cycle of more degradation and more depredation. On the other hand, no, because everyone can be trained in higher values and better behavior through *bhakti-yoga* and the standards of Krishna's social system, *varṇāśrama*. Also, Indians and Europeans do not have the monopoly on noble blood. There have been other royal lineages in the world, and education is more important than some distant, diluted DNA. More importantly, nobility is already in every soul,

beyond the gross and subtle covering of physical and psychic bodies. Uncovering the qualities of the soul through the process of *bhakti-yoga* can release the untapped potential in humans and unleash the spirit of servant-leadership."

Everyone has the potential to improve; Srila Prabhupada said: "The government is managed by the *śūdras* or less than *śūdras, mleccha . . .* So people should be trained up as *brāhmaṇa*, as *kṣatriya*, as *vaiśya.*" (Lecture on SB 1.2.6, Calcutta, 27 Feb 1974) Systematic training is the first strategic purpose of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness: "To systematically propagate spiritual knowledge to society at large and to educate all people in the techniques of spiritual life in order to check the imbalance of values in life, and to achieve real unity and peace in the world." But without spiritual education the prospects for society at large are bleak indeed: "By training one becomes *vaiśya*, one becomes *kṣatriya*, one becomes *brāhmin*. Where is that training? All *śūdras* . . . their only business is . . . eating and drinking—eating flesh, drinking wine. *Mlecchas, yavanas*, they are accepting government post. What good government you can expect? Forget. Forget good government for millions of years. Unless you

establish this *varṇāśrama-dharma*, there is no question of good government." (Lecture on SB 1.2.28-29, Vrindavana, 8 Nov 1972)

Please, Get It: It's the *Guṇas*

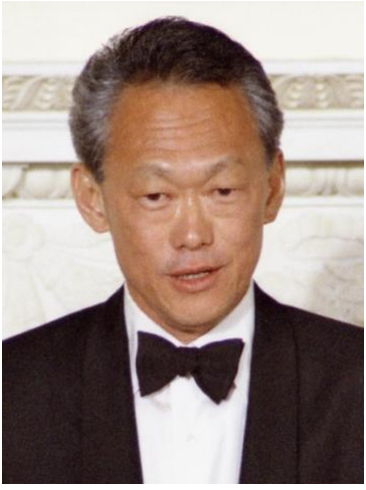
It's not a question of *racism*, it's a question of science: human behavior is based on and influenced by several factors, such as genetic make-up, culture, habits, individual values and attitudes. Krishna explains in the *Bhagavad-gita*, 4.13: *cātur-varṇyaṁ mayā sṛṣṭaṁ guṇa-karma-vibhāgaśaḥ* "According to the three modes of material nature and the work associated with them, the four divisions of human society are created by Me." These divisions are not *races*; they are not based on birth or morphological traits but on *guṇa*, qualities, and *karma,* actions. When Srila Prabhupada speaks of *brāhmaṇas, kṣatriyas, vaiśyas,* and *śūdras,* he is not talking of *races* but of psychological types. Within a homogenous population, a priest or an intellectual doesn't belong to a different race than, say, a merchant or an artisan. When Krishna describes each social group in the *Gita* (18.42-44), He says absolutely nothing about skin color, facial features, hair type or geography. Such divisions exist everywhere, at

different levels of sophistication, civilization and God consciousness. When an ethnic group or nationality predominantly manifests the characteristics of a class or exhibits an uncivilized conduct, it is not wrong to make a general observation; understanding that we are not making a literal, absolute proclamation. We also understand that people can change through cultivation of higher or lower habits. Proper training affects behavior and, over time, over generations, better behavior builds better genetics, also because better people attract better souls into their families; souls already on the path of emancipation. Debasing, self-destructive behavior affects one's descendants as well. When certain habits (such as, say, taking intoxicants) and cultural values (such as, say, accepting eating beef as normal - even necessary) become ingrained over considerable time in a large enough population recognizable by morphology and geography, we might colloquially refer to a human assemblage as a *race* or, politically, a country. And souls that have developed similar inclinations and carry comparable karmic baggage will tend to take birth in such ethnic groups. All Srila Prabhupada is saying is that people with specific antisocial tendency are born in aboriginal races in various parts of the world. They attract as their children

souls with similar issues. It's not *race*; it's karma. Sentimental, untrained contemporary people might try to whitewash the fact that it's not by chance that people take birth in different places and different families. It's not by chance that people are born with different characteristics (beautiful or ugly; rich or poor; smart or slow; gifted or inept, etc.). Succumbing to their uninformed emotions, modern ignoramuses may attempt to minimize or erase differences, saying that it's all the same; that all cultures should be valued and respected equally, blah, blah, blah. They lost sight of the fact that there is right and wrong; good and bad; elevation and degradation. Because they lack a valid theoretical framework and an authentic moral compass, they may think that eating fish in the Amazonas is the same as eating Jagannatha *maha-prasada* in Puri. They are, frankly speaking, foolish. Therefore they get all bent out of shape when Srila Prabhupada, through the lenses of the Vedic literature, reminds us that certain groups are higher and other groups are lower - not in the racial sense - but because some are more virtuous while others remain addicted to debasing activities. But - and I won't tire to repeat it - he also always stresses that the lower can become higher and the higher can become lower, because behavior can change.

A Miracle in Singapore?

In connection with the corruption of government servants, behavior can drastically change in a society through systematic intervention. Take Singapore for instance. Singapore is ranked as the fourth least corrupt country in the world and the most transparent in Asia; but prior to self-government, achieved in 1959, corruption was rampant. An earlier visitor doing business there might have concluded that Singaporeans were naturally corrupt. Someone else, visiting now, could assume that Singaporeans are inherently honest. Both would be wrong; Singaporeans, as all humans, have the capacity to act in either elevating or degrading fashions. Through enough external stimuli - indoctrination, family example, peer pressure, government planning, etc. - desirable or undesirable behavior can be produced, even in large populations. Multiple papers have been written on the Singapore experience of turning a corrupt administration into a law-abiding one. I am quoting from one of those papers to give a sense of the high standards that have been enacted and the healthy culture that has been established: "[I]t took a feat of political will to exterminate the scourge of corruption . . . A distinctive and unique feature of the



Lee Kuan Yew, 1923-2015 (here seen in 1975), served as Prime Minister of Singapore for 31 years (1959-1990)

PCA [Prevention of Corruption Act] is the presumption of corruption where the public sector is involved . . . This presumption reflects the paramount importance of a clean and incorruptible public service in Singapore. Public servants and people who deal with the public administration are held to a higher standard than everyone else not only because of the important roles they play, but also because the confidence in Singapore's public administration cannot be undermined lest the core values of equality and meritocracy be eroded – the public service cannot only be incorruptible, it must also be *seen* to be incorruptible . . . This presumption provides an effective deterrence against corruption in the public sector . . . public sector corruption cases account for only 15% of all corruption cases investigated in Singapore in 2016 . . . Since Mr Lee Kuan Yew, the founding Prime Minister of Singapore, and his team formed government in 1959, there

has been a conscious and sustained effort to develop a society and culture that eschews corruption. Singaporeans expect and demand a clean system of governance, and do not condone giving or accepting 'social lubricants' just to get things done."[24] Today, the average Singaporean won't request, accept, or offer bribes. But it wasn't always like that. I am getting into some detail here to substantiate Srila Prabhupada radical statements that human society can be restored to sanity, even in the middle of Kali-yuga; and that it's not a question of race, but of proper stewardship: "Anywhere you go you'll find four classes of men. First class: intelligent men . . . scientists, philosophers, like that; mathematicians, great religionists . . . The second class, administrator, to see that the government is going nicely, people are not unhappy, people are not suffering from thieves and rogues. That is the first business. Good government means that people will think that they're secure, their property and person is secure . . . Everywhere you go, any part of the world, nobody is happy, either in family or community and society, nationwide, you take. Everyone is distrust, unhappiness, godlessness . . . So it is the duty of the government, that this man is professing as a *brāhmaṇa*, as a *kṣatriya* or a *vaiśya*, whether he is acting,

[24] https://www.unafei.or.jp/publications/pdf/GG11/23_GG11_CP_Singapore2.pdf

or whether he's cheating others. No cheating will be allowed. That is government's duty." (Lecture on SB 1.16.4, Los Angeles, 1 Jan 1974) Of course, Srila Prabhupada is describing broader standards than simply bribing or no bribing, but the point here is that Singapore's spectacular turnaround in stamping out corruption cannot be ascribed to a racial trait but to a concerted effort. First of all, the basic racial, genetic parameters didn't magically mutate in 1959, when Singapore became independent and Lee Kuan Yew's crew took over. Second, Singapore is a multi-racial and multi-cultural society. By ethnicity, 75.9% are Chinese - the predominant group - 15% Malay and 7.5% Indian. Frankly speaking, freedom from corruption isn't necessarily a distinguishing feature of current Chinese culture. China ranks only 78th in the *Corruption Perceptions Index Rank*; but Taiwan, racially indistinguishable from the Mainland China, is doing much better and it's ranked 28th. So, it's not the race that makes government agents honest or dishonest. Singapore's success in controlling corruption cannot be explained by racial considerations, but by the priorities and proficiency of the leaders of the country. Therefore, the sweeping generalizations expressed by Srila Prabhupada about ethnic groups or nationalities should remain subordinate

to his other set of statements, in which he sees potential in every human being (and even in lower species): "This Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement is the greatest welfare activities in the human society. We are giving information to every man, without any discrimination of caste, creed and color, that every human being especially... not only human being; all living entities, including the animals, beasts, birds, trees, aquatics—everyone—they can achieve to the highest perfection of life by this Kṛṣṇa consciousness." (Lecture at the San Francisco Ratha-yatra, 27 June 1971) Can anyone call this kind of statement *racist*? My research convinced me that Srila Prabhupada cannot be legitimately branded as racist, but I am also positive that his style of expression in connection with these issues shouldn't be imitated by his followers. In the spirit of protecting Srila Prabhupada's legacy and with the aim of pleasing him, ISKCON should firmly dissociate itself from some of the things he said about Blacks, Native Americans, Hitler, etc.

Isn't Rising Above a Conditioning more Glorious than Not Having It?

Srila Rupa Goswami wrote in the first verse of his *Upadesamrita*:

vāco vegaṁ manasaḥ krodha-vegaṁ
jihvā-vegam udaropastha-vegam
etān vegān yo viṣaheta dhīraḥ
sarvām apīmāṁ pṛthivīṁ sa śiṣyāt

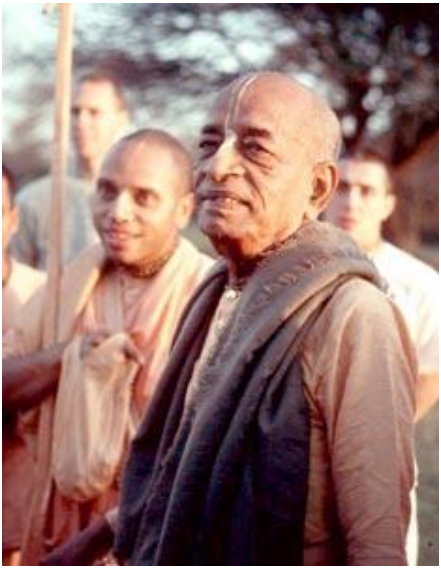
"A sober person who can tolerate the urge to speak, the mind's demands, the actions of anger and the urges of the tongue, belly and genitals is qualified to make disciples all over the world." Racial and other forms of partisanships would fit within the urges of the mind (*manasaḥ*), tendencies and tastes that are culturally generated; embedded in the psyche at different depths. What's crucial to note is that Srila Rupa Goswami doesn't say that a spiritual leader must be *devoid* of such impulses to be effective. He says that one must be able to *tolerate* them (*viṣaheta*), and not being overwhelmed or controlled by such drives. Then, one "is qualified to make disciples all over the world" (*pṛthivīṁ sa śiṣyāt*) - which is exactly what

Srila Prabhupada did, first among Vaisnava *acaryas* in recorded history. In one sense, isn't experiencing an internal urge but not acting on it more glorious, more heroic than not feeling any urge at all? One meaning of *transcend* is "be or go beyond the range or limits of (a field of activity or conceptual sphere)" (Google); "to go beyond or rise above a limit" (Cambridge); "to triumph over the negative or restrictive aspects of [something]" (Merriam-Webster). Therefore, even if, for argument's sake, Srila Prabhupada's mind (the subtle body, external to the self) had picked up and harbored some feelings of discrimination towards people of African ancestry, he demonstrated to have fully transcended whatever bias there might have been by welcoming black people into ISKCON, by traveling five times to Africa (and stressing that the propagation there be focused on the locals, not on the Indians), by accepting Black disciples, by initiating them as *brahmanas*, and, at least in one case, by awarding to an African American disciple the order of *sannyasa.* He wrote to an African disciple: "We are not concerned with the skin but with the soul. As it is stated in the *Bhagavad-gita As It Is* (Bg 5.18):

vidya-vinyaya-sampanne
brahmane gavi hastini

suni caiva svapake ca
panditah sama-darsinah

'The humble sage, by virtue of true knowledge, sees with equal vision a learned and gentle *brahmana*, a cow, an elephant, a dog and a dog-eater (outcaste).' So Krsna consciousness means not to make any distinctions of black or white, Christian or Muslim or Hindu, African, American or Indian. Krsna claims everyone as His son." (Letter to Charles - Krishna Balarama - 29 April 1977) On the same day, he wrote to Brahmananda, his leader in Africa: "The letter which you have sent from the student, Charles, is wonderful. I have asked that it be published in our English Back To Godhead as well as in all of the Indian language Back to Godheads here in India. Charles' letter shows that he is very intelligent." (Letter to Brahmananda,



29 April 1977) Obviously Srila Prabhupada was able to recognize excellence wherever he found it.

In October 1975 Srila Prabhupada visited South Africa, then at the height of the Apartheid, the system of racial segregation that ensured political, social and economic dominion by the minority white population. The *Śrīla Prabhupāda-līlāmṛta* narrates: "Śrīla Prabhupāda's arrival at the Johannesburg airport was culturally extraordinary for South Africa – white men bowing down before an Indian! . . . Prabhupāda spoke strongly against racial discrimination, but unlike Mahatma Gandhi, who had been imprisoned in South Africa for his outspoken views, Prabhupāda spoke on the authority of scripture. 'What is this black-white business?' he said. 'It is nonsense. It is the bodily concept of life.' In South Africa such statements would ordinarily have been considered volatile politics, yet everyone appreciated Śrīla Prabhupāda, because he spoke on a purely spiritual level." (*Śrīla Prabhupāda-līlāmṛta,* Chapter 48) Going beyond skin-consciousness had been a consistent theme in Srila Prabhupada's message: "If we make distinction between man and woman, black and white, then how in our temple we are enjoying together? Because we, actually, we are equal on the spiritual

platform. We do not say that 'You are woman. You cannot become my disciple,' or 'You are black; therefore you cannot become my disciple.' No. We welcome everyone." (Lecture Arrival at Temple, Philadelphia, 11 July 1975)

To make them feel comfortable, Srila Prabhupada authorized African American disciples in Ohio to have their own temple. He wrote to the local GBC: "I have just received one letter from the black devotees in Cleveland who wish start their own ISKCON Center independently of the white devotees there. In principle, it is alright, birds of a feather will flock together. We should not discourage them in any way from opening their own center . . . there is no objection if they want to remain separate from the white people." (Letter to Satsvarupa, 24 Aug 1972)

The Merriam-Webster dictionary offer two slightly different definitions of *racist*: "(a): *having, reflecting, or fostering the belief that race is a fundamental determinant of human traits and capacities and that racial differences produce an inherent superiority of a particular race.*" There are things Srila Prabhupada said that have been interpreted as fitting the above description; but I believe such statements were mostly

sweeping generalizations or oversimplifications - not expressions of underlying animosity or discrimination. The second Merriam-Webster definition of *racist*, though, can't be attributed to Srila Prabhupada at all: "(b): of, relating to, or characterized by the systemic oppression of a racial group to the social, economic, and political advantage of another." Both theoretically and practically, Srila Prabhupada offered unrestricted opportunities for spiritual and social elevation to everyone. He gave full access to people from all ethnic groups to all forms of sophisticated spiritual practice, such as the recitation of the Gayatri mantras and the worship of the Deities, without any discrimination. He consistently spoke on various anthropological levels: the purely spiritual, the historical, the physical, etc. and the attentive researcher should distinguish what level he was addressing. We need to keep in mind that his fundamental, essential teachings were on the level of the soul. He gave his love unconditionally, to all embodied beings. Srila Prabhupada's greatness need not be tarnished by occasional, informal assertions. His psychic body, external and extraneous to the soul, might have imbibed certain cultural conditionings and might have assimilated certain aesthetic leanings tainted by racial prejudice - but he

transcended them by not allowing such acquired instincts to affect the policies of his missionary work. As his followers, we have the burdensome, thankless duty to explain the things he said, even the contentious ones. It's called *apologetics*, and every religious group at one point faces the need to offer reasoned arguments to validate and vindicate its tradition, theologically, ethically and historically. We need to explain why Srila Prabhupada said things that appear outrageous to contemporary sensitivities. If his statements do not come directly from scriptural revelation, where did he get such notions? It's hard to unwrap the complexities of the interplay between the imported British racism - against Indians and other ethnic groups - and the casteism/colorism that pervaded (and still pervades) Indian society. Both may predispose one to summarily evaluate individuals based on their origin or skin color. Srila Prabhupada said things that can sound cringeworthy; we can't just sweep such loaded statements under the carpet (unless you have an extremely large carpet). As an analogy, why are there fossils of aquatic, oceanic species up in the Himalayas? We must conclude that portions of the Himalayas at one point were under water - which doesn't make the Himalayas less majestic. Similarly, how can a pure devotee say that human

beings (of a particular race) should be *owned*, as slaves, by other human beings or that nobody among Jews is interested in religion? Such words can be explained if that pure devotee at times expressed himself brazenly, but can we completely rule out some degree, even if minimal and later transcended, of racial favoritism? It seems that we must conclude that the psyche of that pure devotee at one point had been, like the Himalayas, "under water." That his subtle body at one point was soaked in a racially biased environment - a condition that nonetheless didn't affect his pure devotion and his divine empowerment. Like the Himalayas, Srila Prabhupada, despite whatever external, conditioned influence he might have been subjected to, stood tallest, as the twentieth century's greatest messenger of the word of God.

Academic Witch-Hunt

The necessary and long overdue rejection of racism is in full swing, but at times it assumes the frenzied overtones of a witch-hunt. As an example, let me report in some detail what recently transpired in one of the top academic institutions of the world, Princeton University. A 2020

article in *The Atlantic*, "The Princeton Faculty's Anti-Free-Speech Demands," narrates how "Princeton university is consumed from top to bottom with what seems to be the question of the moment: How should it reorder itself to fight racism? . . . roughly 350 faculty members and staff signed an open letter . . . that set forth nearly 50 demands" including what the article describes as a "racism tribunal," a committee "that would oversee the investigation and discipline of racist behaviors, incidents, research, and publication on the part of faculty." [25] Distancing itself from part of this letter, Joshua T. Katz, professor of classics at Princeton, in his article *A Declaration of Independence by a Princeton Professor,* writes that he is "embarrassed" for the signatories. The professor drily notes that "in these past two months . . . 'black' has become 'Black' while 'white' remains 'white.'" he says that he supports plenty of the ideas expressed in the letter, while finding some vague and unreasonable. He writes: "Some examples: 'Reward the invisible work done by faculty of color with course relief and summer salary' and 'Faculty of color hired at the junior level should be

[25] https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2020/08/what-princeton-professors-really-think-about-defining-racism/614911/

guaranteed one additional semester of sabbatical' and 'Provide additional human resources for the support of junior faculty of color.' Let's leave aside who qualifies as 'of color,' though this is not a trivial point. It boggles my mind that anyone would advocate giving people—extraordinarily privileged people already, let me point out: Princeton professors—extra perks for no reason other than their pigmentation."[26]

Not surprisingly, some people found Katz's remarks annoying. In her article *The New Puritans*, Anne Applebaum reports that, as an apparent retaliation to Katz's position, *The Daily Princetonian*, a student newspaper, "spent seven months investigating his past relationships with students, eventually convincing university officials to relitigate incidents from years earlier that had already been adjudicated . . . The *Daily Princetonian* investigation looks more like an attempt to ostracize a professor guilty of wrong-think than an attempt to bring resolution to a case of alleged misbehavior."[27]

[26] https://quillette.com/2020/07/08/a-declaration-of-independence-by-a-princeton-professor/
[27] https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2021/10/new-puritans-mob-justice-canceled/619818/

Later reminiscing on the experience, Katz wrote: "A little more than a year ago, in July 2020, I wrote a controversial article that led to a massive brouhaha, with numerous people—including dozens I had long imagined were friends—calling for me to be disciplined, perhaps fired, for expressing views about race that few would have found contentious just a year or two before."[28] In his previous article Katz had concluded that it would be difficult for anyone to be exonerated from the accusation of racism: "There is no reason for me to say more: Innumerable sensible people have commented on the impossibility that anyone can pass the Purity Test. Someone who passes today will not pass tomorrow."

This episode is in no way an exception. The academic environment is so rife with inquisitory attitudes that any allegation of racial discrimination can seriously affect or terminate a career. For instance, the article "Professors Need the Power to Fire Diversity Bureaucrats" describes that when US President Joe Biden pledged to nominate a Black woman to the Supreme Court, legal scholar Ilya Shapiro objected to that pledge, "because he believed that jurists of all races should be considered" and because he

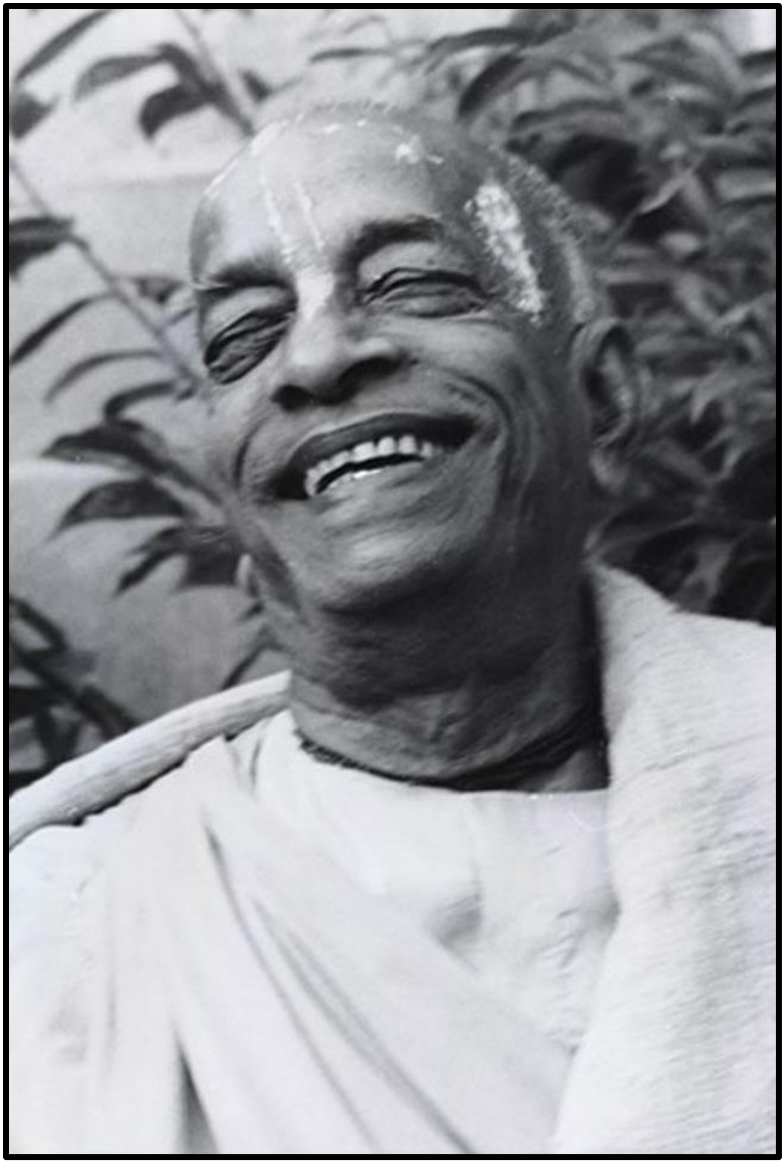
[28] https://www.firstthings.com/article/2021/10/my-confessions

had someone else in mind (not a Black woman) as his best candidate for the Supreme Court. Some interpreted his preference as "expressing the racist belief that Black women are inferior jurists." Georgetown university suspended him and started an investigation that lasted *months*. Finally, Shapiro was cleared and reinstated but he quickly voluntarily resigned, "explaining that after reading the Georgetown diversity office's report on his case, he felt sure that its expansive notions of what inclusion requires would be used to persecute him."[29] He moved to another working environment instead of having to undergo further inquests.

In this climate, it's not surprising if Srila Prabhupada's remarks attract unrestrained condemnation. The increased scrutiny of authors and other public figures directly connects with the title of this section: *Racism in Srila Prabhupada's Teachings?* In this frantic atmosphere more and more people will answer the question in the positive. It's a sad but inescapable fact: Srila Prabhupada's reputation won't remained unscathed. The Society he founded needs to maturely deal with the fallout. This

[29] https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2022/06/ilya-shapiro-georgetown-diversity-bureaucrats/661247/

book, which aims at internal audiences, represents an attempt to show that Srila Prabhupada's message wasn't racist at all. In fact, his teachings were purely spiritual and radically egalitarian. At the same time, I believe ISKCON should disavow his occasional statements that could be construed as racist by a rigid - and perhaps disingenuous - literal interpretation.



3. Homophobia in Srila Prabhupada's Teachings?

Homophobia: Etymology Blues

I never liked the word *homophobia*. My first, minor objection is that it's structurally incomplete; the prefix *homo-* simply means "same" or "equal" (it comes from the Greek *homos*, "one and the same"). So, in its present form *homophobia* should simply mean "fear of the same" - which doesn't make sense. But my main issue is that *homophobia* can be easily and unfairly used to categorically stigmatize as pathological any disinclination toward homosexuality or to problematize any dissent with demands for homosexuals' rights.

The word *phobia* comes from the Greek word *phobos*, "fear" or "terror." In English it refers to a persistent, excessive and irrational fear of something that's unlikely to

cause harm - as in *alektorophobia*, fear of chickens, *bibliophobia*, fear of books, or *triskaidekaphobia*, fear of the number thirteen (yes, there are people suffering from such things...). The phobic person either tries to avoid what triggers the fear or endures the situation with great anxiety and distress. There is no indication that those branded as *homophobes* are terrified of homosexuals or feel intense agony in their presence. Do they experience cultural incompatibility and tension? Sure. Prejudice? Perhaps. Discomfort or distaste? Possible. Loathing? Maybe. But *phobia*? Nah.

While in Greek *homos* means "same"; in Latin *homo* means "man" or "human being" (as in *homo sapiens*). In fact, in 1908 the medical journal *The Alienist and Neurologist*, first used *homophobia* as "fear of men"; related to the earlier word *gynephobia*, "fear of women," coined in 1886 and mostly spelled nowadays as *gynophobia*. In the 1960s *homophobia* was recycled to condemn any form of aversion for homosexuality and homosexuals. The repurposing of the term *homophobia* was a clever rhetorical and political device: if you do not unconditionally embrace homosexuality as normal (whatever that means), or if you do not unreservedly

support the homosexuals' legal aspirations, you are mentally sick. Any visceral disinclination or intellectual disagreement with any dimension of the homosexual agenda can be, and often is, summarily branded as *homophobic* - a deviant, neurotic attitude. To classify someone as *homophobe* is, every so often, a cheap shot.

I must admit that the remodeling and weaponization of the term *homophobia*, first used in writing, with that sense, in 1969, was a shrewd cultural stratagem. The expression has been influential in reversing the public perception from taking homosexuality as a problem or an illness, to seeing hostility toward homosexuality as a problem or an illness. It communicates the idea that something is seriously, clinically wrong with heterosexuals who dislike homosexuality in any of its manifestations. Labels do impact and shape how we think about subjects; the term *homophobia* soon became an important lexical tool in gay and lesbian activism - despite its non-scientific and semantically awkward origin. Psychology professor Gregory M. Herek, who conducted extensive research on prejudice against sexual minorities, coined the expression *sexual prejudice* as a replacement for the term *homophobia*. Herek writes: "Ironically, labeling

homophobia a mental disorder has something in common with the erroneous classification of homosexuality as a sickness prior to 1973. In both cases, a diagnostic label is used to stigmatize a disliked pattern of thought and behavior. Using the label misrepresents what really is a subjective value judgment as a scientific, empirically grounded conclusion." It's a common phenomenon in linguistics that words constantly assume new meanings and usages. *Phobia* outgrew its clinical confines as a range of anxiety disorders to encompass social and cultural tensions. In recent decades terms such as *xenophobia* or *Islamophobia* have taken central stage in political debate. In any case, it appears that the word *homophobia* is here to stay. No point in ignoring it or trying to delegitimize its present usage. We need to deal with it. Therefore, back to the crucial question: was Srila Prabhupada a homophobe; whatever that means?

In my mind the answer is not so clear-cut. If we take homophobe to mean someone hostile toward gay men or lesbians, the answer would be no. Srila Prabhupada wasn't hostile to homosexuals. He engaged them in *bhakti-yoga* as every other human being. He treated them with cordiality and affection. In at least one case, he even

appointed a gay man as member of the *Governing Body Commission*, the highest ecclesiastical council of his International Society for Krishna Consciousness, awarding that person also the order of renunciation (*sannyasa*), the highest of the four phases of socio-spiritual classification. One characteristic of homophobes is "discrimination against homosexuality" (Merriam-Webster), an ethically loaded definition indicating unfair or prejudicial attitudes. Was Srila Prabhupada's perception of homosexuality tainted by prejudice, or was it fair and accurate? We could ask the same question through the lenses of the traditional Vaisnava value system (in which Vedic revelations represent the highest authority and reliable yardstick): were Srila Prabhupada views fully in line with *sastra* (scriptures) and with Gaudiya-vaisnava *siddhanta* (theological conclusions)? Or was his approach somewhat affected by other, less wholesome cultural influences? Of course, for some of his followers just raising such questions may reek of sacrilege. The asking itself can be seen as heretical. Someone may subscribe to the idea that Srila Prabhupada was, to the maximum extent possible in an individual living entity, perfect and infallible; faultless and flawless in all spheres of action and thought. Some believe that even considering the *possibility* of any conditioning

in Srila Prabhupada is in itself offensive. What can I say? Perhaps this book is not for them. I feel a sense of responsibility in addressing these issues, especially as the condemnation of Srila Prabhupada already roars in the open and irrepressible forum of the World Wide Web. In blunt and intransigent terms Srila Prabhupada is being vilified, for the billions to shape their perceptions. And so I am going ahead with my exploration; not to provide an hagiographical account; not to provide a pious, well-intentioned but biased defense, but to attempt to identify what is actually going on. What was actually said and why? I am working to shed light on areas of reality easily occulted by bigotry.

Regarding homosexuality, inside ISKCON we encounter fervent but unexamined convictions and party-lines - which are unofficial and therefore unrepresentative of the Society. It is said that fools rush in where angels fear to tread; and perhaps this book would act as the definitive, unassailable proof that I am, indeed, an incorrigible fool. So, be it. I pray for the forgiveness and clemency of the wise readers. As swans separate milk from water, may they discern in this imperfect attempt of mine whatever

valuable information they can find, while mercifully discarding the defective elements.

Srila Prabhupada on Homosexuality (and Sexuality at Large)

In the bigger scheme of things, Srila Prabhupada's role was to contribute to the re-spiritualization of the world, to the establishing of the perennial principles of *dharma*. His mission was to help people reconnect with their origin, their true shelter, and their ultimate destination: the Supreme Personality of Godhead, Sri Krishna. Among other obstacles to emancipation and anchors to development, indiscriminate sexual activity (hetero- or homosexual), certainly disrupts individual growth and obstructs spiritual freedom. Therefore, Srila Prabhupada did speak against homosexual entanglements - as he spoke against a million other potential sources of debasement. If we take homophobe to mean "a person who . . . scorns . . . gay sexual orientation" (dictionary.com), to some extent Srila Prabhupada may fit the description. But was his scorn legitimate? That's the million-dollar question.

Could it be that his disparagement was perfectly justified, in line with superhuman and undisputable truths? Whatever it may be, he did express some degree of scorn for homosexuality: "I am very sorry that you have taken to homosex." He wrote to a disciple, "It will not help you advance in your attempt for spiritual life. In fact, it will only hamper your advancement. I do not know why you have taken to such abominable activities. What can I say? Anyway, try to render whatever service you can to Krishna. Even though you are in a very degraded condition Krishna, being pleased with your service attitude, can pick you up from your fallen state. You should stop this homosex immediately. It is illicit sex, otherwise, your chances of advancing in spiritual life are nil. Show Krishna you are serious, if you are." (Letter to Lalitananda, 26 May 1975) So, addictions to homosexual practices "hamper" spiritual life to the point of reducing to "nil" one's "chances of advancing"; nonetheless, devotional service should go on from any condition: "try to render whatever service you can to Krishna." At first sight these appear as indisputably homophobic statements; but we shouldn't forget that Srila Prabhupada decried as "poison" all forms of "illicit sex" (sex outside marriage or, in a narrower definition, sex within wedlock, but without reproductive intentions). He

lamented when his disciples got ensnared by unrestricted sex in any form, not only of the gay variety: "Illicit sex is so dangerous . . . Everyone will be killed with the illicit sex . . . And in our society it is very easy to have affair, so many girls are there. I can say 'Don't do this,' but if you do, what can I do? . . . This is the poison, illicit sex, and this poison will kill everything. This is the poison. And I cannot understand whether I shall be able to save my disciples from this poison." (Conversation, Bombay, 3 Jan 1975) This should always be kept in mind when analyzing Srila Prabhupada's views on homosexuality. A true homophobe may disdain gay sex but enthusiastically endorse unrestricted heterosexual frolicking. Not Srila Prabhupda. He admonished against *all forms* of misuse and abuse of sexuality. A "classic" *Bhagavad-gita* purport reveals the overall Vedic outlook on sex, especially recreational, non-procreational sex: "It is said in the *Manu-smṛti* that lust cannot be satisfied by any amount of sense enjoyment, just as fire is never extinguished by a constant supply of fuel. In the material world, the center of all activities is sex, and thus this material world is called *maithunya-āgāra*, or the shackles of sex life. In the ordinary prison house, criminals are kept within bars; similarly, the criminals who are disobedient to the laws of the Lord are

shackled by sex life. Advancement of material civilization on the basis of sense gratification means increasing the duration of the material existence of a living entity. Therefore, this lust is the symbol of ignorance by which the living entity is kept within the material world. While one enjoys sense gratification, it may be that there is some feeling of happiness, but actually that so-called feeling of happiness is the ultimate enemy of the sense enjoyer." (Bg 3.39, purport) The information on what's proper or improper, sinful or godly, virtuous or guilty is ultimately for the benefit of the people. These recommendations are not bigoted restrictions concocted by angry, joyless, neurotic religionists who hate life and therefore, under the weight of heavy personal traumas, dedicate themselves to harass everybody, to make existence gloomy also for everyone else. No, these guidelines ultimately aim to facilitate the path to full freedom and happiness: "The difference between material and spiritual enjoyment is that material enjoyment is limited. Even if a man engages in material sex enjoyment, he cannot enjoy it for long. But when the sex enjoyment is given up, then one can enter spiritual life, which is unending." (SB 3.20.35, purport) The spirit is to discourage absorption in something inferior and ephemeral to focus on something sublime and

permanent. Lord Krishna, the supremely benevolent well-wisher and Father of all, says in the *Bhagavad-gita*: "That which in the beginning may be just like poison but at the end is just like nectar and which awakens one to self-realization is said to be happiness in the mode of goodness." (Bg 18.37) The medicine may taste bitter, but the treatment is the true friend of the patient.

Krishna in Sex

Quoting the *Bhagavad-gita*, Srila Prabhupada also said: "*dharmāviruddho bhūteṣu kāmo 'smi bharatarṣabha* [Bg 7.11] . . . sex intercourse is lusty but when you beget a child, even you are lusty, if you beget a child according to the *śāstras*, *dharmāviruddhaḥ* [not against dharma] . . . In our society this restriction is there; we don't allow illicit sex life, simply one can have a marital life sex and that is also for begetting children. Not for any other purpose, so Kṛṣṇa says here that, *dharmāviruddho bhūteṣu kāmo 'smi bharatarṣabha*. That kind of lusty conjunction between husband and wife, 'I am.' Kṛṣṇa says. So it is not that Kṛṣṇa conscious people are forbidden from sex life but their sex

life is for serving Kṛṣṇa. To produce Kṛṣṇa conscious children, not cats and dogs. That is Kṛṣṇa, that sexual intercourse is Kṛṣṇa, here Kṛṣṇa says." (Lecture on Bg 7.7, Bombay, 1 April 1971) So Srila Prabhupada wasn't an unrealistic sex-denier. He accepted that within civilized, religious life, "Sex is there. Sex is not bad." (Lecture on SB 6.1.11, New York, 25 July 1971) Appropriate sex life even represents Krishna: "Kṛṣṇa says that *kāmo 'smi bharatarṣabha, dharmāviruddho bhūteṣu* [I am sex life which is not contrary to religious principles, O lord of the Bhāratas] . . . Religion means regulation . . . Kṛṣṇa says: 'I am there.' Everything is there. Kṛṣṇa is everything. Even in sexual intercourse there is Kṛṣṇa. But how? *Dharmāviruddhaḥ*, not against the laws of *śāstra* . . . So there is Kṛṣṇa consciousness even in begetting children. Provided you follow." (Lecture on Bg 7.11-12, Bombay, 25 Feb 1974)

Homosexuality in the *Dharma-sastras*

The *Manu-samhita*, 11.174, equates homosexual sex to a man having sex with a menstruating woman, or having sex during the day, and the punishment involves purification rites: bathing with clothes on, fasting for a night, and eating specific cow milk- and urine-related products. Failure to purify can result in loss of caste. Of course, when we talk about *dharma-sastras* we come to a tricky place as we might not know what parts have been interpolated. To complicate matters, Indian traditional culture is not uniform: the same act has been interpreted as a lighter or heavier infraction in different kingdoms, in different centuries, by different legislators. *Wikipedia* elaborates: "Hindus have many sacred texts and different communities give special importance to different texts . . . Hindus also foster disparate interpretations of the meaning of various texts . . . Hindu texts (Mostly Dharmasastras) such as the Manusmriti . . . Atri Smrti . . . Baudhāyana Dharmasūtra, and the . . . Apastambha Dharmasūtra do treat homosexuality as a sin, in some cases legally punishable . . . Devdutt Pattanaik summarizes the place of

homosexuality in Hindu literature as follows: 'though not part of the mainstream, its existence was acknowledged but not approved.' Other Indologists assert that homosexuality was not approved for brahmanas or the twice-born but accepted among other castes . . . There are other ancient Hindu/Sanskrit texts that refer to homosexuality. The Sushruta Samhita, for example, a highly respected Hindu medical text dating back to at least 600 B.C., mentions two different types of homosexual men (*kumbhika* – men who take the passive role in anal sex; and *asekya* – men who devour the semen of other men) as well as transgender people (*sandha* – men with the qualities, behavior and speech of women). It also states that men who behave like women, or women who behave like men, are determined as such at the time of their conception in the womb. (SS 3.2.42–43) . . . Other texts list the various types of men who are impotent with women (known in Sanskrit as *sandha*, *kliba*, *napumsaka*, and *panda*). The *Sabda-kalpa-druma* Sanskrit-Sanskrit dictionary, for instance, lists twenty types, as does the *Kamatantra* and *Smriti-Ratnavali* of Vacaspati (14th century). The Narada Smriti similarly lists fourteen different types. Included among the lists are transgender people (*sandha*), intersex people (*nisarga*), and three

different types of homosexual men (*mukhebhaga*, *kumbhika* and *asekya*) . . . The Arthashastra of Kautilya represents the principle text of secular law and illustrates the attitude of the judiciary towards sexual matters. Heterosexual vaginal sex is proposed as the norm by this text and legal issues arising from deviation therefrom are punishable by fines and in extreme cases by capital punishment. Homosexual acts are cited as a small offence punishable by a fine. It punishes non-vaginal sex with a small fine . . . The Narada Purana in 1.15.936 states that those who have non-vaginal intercourse will go to Retobhojana where they have to live on semen."[30] So, yes, in Indian traditions homosexual acts are considered blameworthy, but with reformatory penances or penalties of various degrees of severity; in some case comparable to, say, a parking ticket. The fact remains that traditional Indian culture recognized the presence of homosexuality in society, and often considered it as a mild transgression. In one sense, the authors of the *Dharma-sastras* were much more worried about infringements in the area of inter-caste sexual relations, which could produce mixed and undesirable progeny. Gay sex didn't pose that problem. When, in the Fifth Canto of the *Bhagavatam*, Sukadeva

[30] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hinduism_and_LGBT_topics

Goswami describes the hellish planets and the correlated transgressions, he lists multiple sins connected with heterosexual indulgence (SB 5.26.8, 9, 20 & 26), but he doesn't seem to indicate anything specific or exclusive about homosexuality. A mention of indiscriminate sex - *sarva-abhigamaḥ* - could be taken as including sodomy; but Srila Prabhupada in the purport focuses on bestiality and doesn't say anything about gay sex: "The sexual urge is so strong that sometimes a man indulges in sexual relations with a cow, or a woman indulges in sexual relations with a dog. Such men and women are put into the hell known as Vajrakaṇṭaka-śālmalī. The Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement forbids illicit sex. From the description of these verses, we can understand what an extremely sinful act illicit sex is." (SB 5.26.21, purport) The key words here are *sarva-abhigamaḥ*, "approaching (sexually) all." The *ācāryas* take it to mean approaching inappropriate women, or intercourse with animals, and no Vaisnava commentator mentions homosexuality. As Sukadeva Goswami explains a little later in the *Bhagavatam*, the principle is that atonement should be proportionate to the sin: "As an expert physician diagnoses and treats a disease according to its gravity, one should undergo atonement according to the severity of one's

sins." (SB 6.1.8) Thus, we can estimate the gravity of a sin by the severity of the required atonement. Srila Prabhupada elaborates: "The *dharma-śāstras* like the *Manu-saṁhitā* prescribe that a man who has committed murder should be hanged and his own life sacrificed in atonement . . . atonement is required, and atonement must be undergone according to the gravity of one's sinful acts." (SB 6.1.8, purport) When the *Manu-samhita*, for instance, recommends that a man atones from a homosexual act by taking a bath fully clothed, we must conclude that the transgression is considered a minor one.

Same-sex Marriage

We have seen how Srila Prabhupada defines *dharma*-friendly sexual intercourse: "In our society this restriction is there we don't allow illicit sex life, simply one can have a marital life sex and that is also for begetting children . . . it is not that Kṛṣṇa conscious people are forbidden from sex life but their sex life is for serving Kṛṣṇa. To produce Kṛṣṇa conscious children." (Lecture on Bg 7.7, Bombay, 1 April 1971) Individuals of the same gender can't reproduce. Are, therefore, all sexually active homosexuals eternally and irredeemably doomed to exclusive, irreligious, illicit

sex? Some members of the Hare Krishna movement would immediately answer, with no hesitation whatsoever, "Yes! all homosexual sex is unlawful! Licit sex is possible only in heterosexual marriage, for making babies." OK, from a certain perspective they would be right; but Srila Prabhupada often presented the "softer" and more inclusive version of the regulative principle, which defines illicit sex as sex outside of marriage. He expressed the simpler form on a number of occasions, including when writing to the Pope (in 1968), to the Archbishop of Canterbury (in 1969), and in the following press conference:

Woman Interviewer: If any of us here this morning wish to become followers . . . what would we have to give or give up?
Prabhupāda: First of all, one has to give up illicit sex life.
Woman Interviewer: Does that include all sex life, or...?
Prabhupāda: Huh?
Woman Interviewer: What is illicit?
Prabhupāda: Illicit sex—without marriage, without any relation, sex life, that is illicit sex life.
Woman Interviewer: So sex is allowed in marriage, but not outside.

Prabhupāda: That is animal sex life. Just as animals, they have no relationship and have sex life. But human society there is restriction. In every country, in every religion, there is a system of marriage. So without marriage, sex life is illicit sex life.
(Press Conference, London, 5 August 1971)

Srila Prabhupada expresses the same idea in a purport of the *Bhagavad-gita*: "The Supreme Godhead here explains the different kinds of austerity and penance . . . He should not indulge in sex outside of married life, for sex is sanctioned in the scripture only in marriage, not otherwise. This is called celibacy." (Bg 17.14, purport) If we accept as authentic this simpler version of the rule - which also involves substantial self-restraint and fidelity - should we take that homosexual intercourse restricted to one's wedded partner (within same-sex marriage) would fulfill the minimum requirement for escaping the label of "illicit sex"? There are certainly many married devotees who take years to come to the ideal platform of having sex only for procreation; nonetheless, they are generally accepted as serious practitioners. Shouldn't the same standard apply to gay and lesbian devotees who are faithful in their monogamy and who formalize their relation

through marriage vows? Shouldn't their standard (sex only within marriage) be considered at the same level of their married (heterosexual) brothers and sisters who do not commit adultery, but unite sexually with no intention of having children?

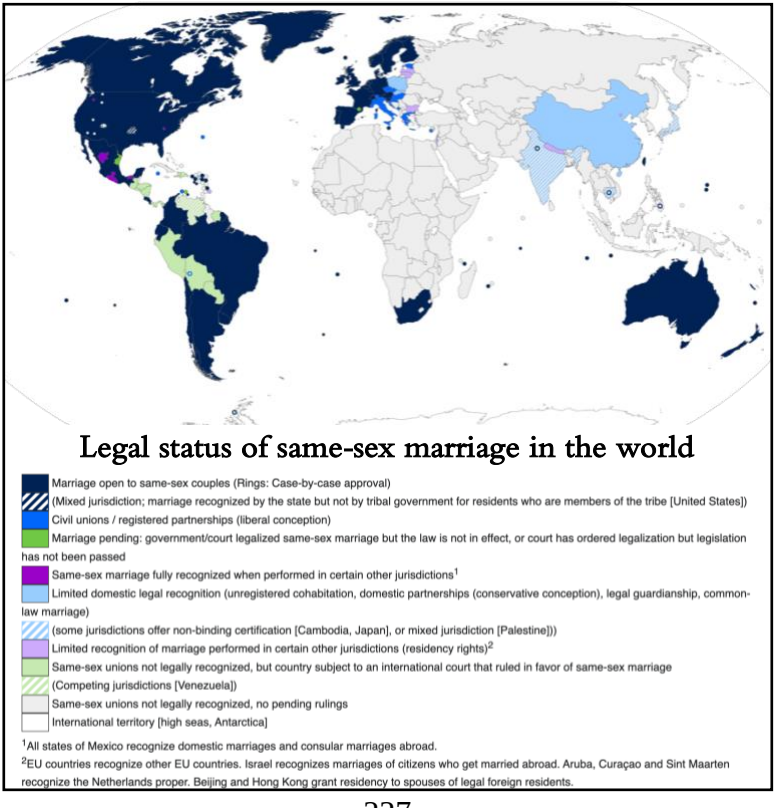
Gay Marriage: Principles & Polarities

Readers may answer these questions as they like. I am aware of different debates and opinions within the Vaisnava community about same-sex marriage. Some even question is such marriage should exist at all. (Of course, in dozens of countries same-sex marriage is already legalized; whether individual Vaisnavas like it or not.) The second discussion is if ISKCON representatives should be permitted to confer some sort of religious dimension to same-sex wedding ceremonies - some ritual, blessing, consecration or whatever. (As per this writing, there is no official position statement by the Governing Body Commission of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness authorizing or forbidding such a practice.) Another dispute centers on if gay monogamy is preferrable

- from a spiritual point of view - to gay promiscuity. Frankly, I never understood the doubt. Isn't fixing the mind on one partner and committing to a faithful relation obviously better than sleeping around indiscriminately? Some religious groups have settled these issues, one way or another. Others, including ISKCON, have not. If we are talking of homosexuals who practice *bhakti-yoga*, I believe the institution of same-sex marriage should be promoted. Everything indicates that marriage would facilitate a mature, committed rapport, encouraging regulation and emotional stability. I believe that what Srila Prabhupada writes in the *Bhagavad-gita* applies to both heterosexual and homosexual matrimonies (although almost certainly he wasn't considering this dual application...): "There are many purificatory processes for advancing a human being to spiritual life. The marriage ceremony, for example, is considered to be one of these sacrifices . . . The Lord says here that any sacrifice which is meant for human welfare should never be given up. *Vivāha-yajña*, the marriage ceremony, is meant to regulate the human mind to become peaceful for spiritual advancement. For most men, this *vivāha-yajña* should be encouraged even by persons in the renounced order of life." (Bg 18.5, purport) We may or may not call same-sex

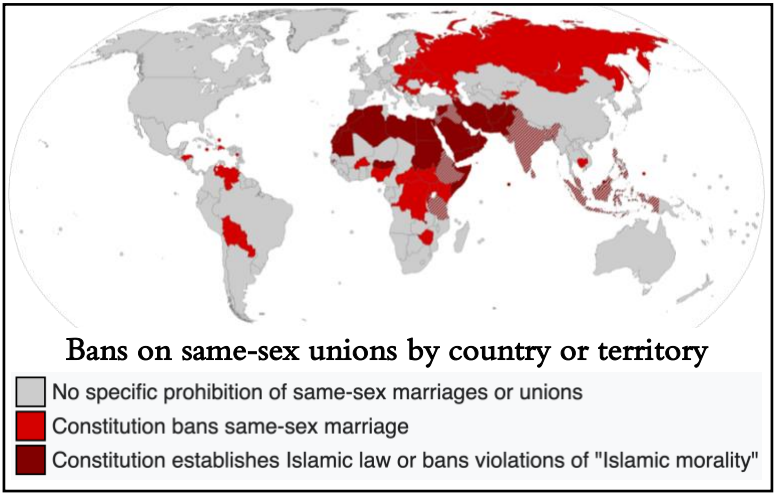
weddings *vivāha-yajñas,* but at one point we would need to define what, if any, ritualistic whistles and bells should be attached to the ceremony. But these are details. The principle of regulating "the human mind to become peaceful for spiritual advancement" remains. The function of marriage in stabilizing the emotional, social, financial and sexual spheres applies to both heterosexuals and homosexuals. But let's look at what Srila Prabhupada said about same-sex marriage. On several occasions he criticized some Christian priests for performing "man-to-man marriage." Obviously, he was defining *marriage* as the wedlock between a man and a woman (monogamy), a man and more women (polygyny), or more men and a woman (polyandry). In any case, apparently in Srila Prabhupada's worldview marriage should involve (at least) one male and one female: "Now they are giving man-to-man marriage, what to speak of other things. The priests, they are sermonizing this man-to-man marriage. Just see how degraded they have become. Whether any conception... at least, outside America nobody knows that a man can be married with another man. What is this? And they're supporting it." (Conversation, Paris, 11 June 1974) So, Srila Prabhupada was surprised, shocked at the novelty of the situation; he considered gay marriage "most

unnatural." (Conversation, Paris, 14 June 1974) something that "outside America nobody" would have seriously entertained. And, at that time, it was indeed something socially far-fetched. Srila Prabhupada spoke those words in 1974; it took another 27 years for any country to legalize same-sex marriage. As per this writing, same-sex marriage is legally performed in 32 countries.


Legal status of same-sex marriage in the world
Marriage open to same-sex couples (Rings: Case-by-case approval)
(Mixed jurisdiction; marriage recognized by the state but not by tribal government for residents who are members of the tribe [United States])
Civil unions / registered partnerships (liberal conception)
Marriage pending: government/court legalized same-sex marriage but the law is not in effect, or court has ordered legalization but legislation has not been passed
Same-sex marriage fully recognized when performed in certain other jurisdictions[1]
Limited domestic legal recognition (unregistered cohabitation, domestic partnerships (conservative conception), legal guardianship, common-law marriage)
(some jurisdictions offer non-binding certification [Cambodia, Japan], or mixed jurisdiction [Palestine]))
Limited recognition of marriage performed in certain other jurisdictions (residency rights)[2]
Same-sex unions not legally recognized, but country subject to an international court that ruled in favor of same-sex marriage
(Competing jurisdictions [Venezuela])
Same-sex unions not legally recognized, no pending rulings
International territory [high seas, Antarctica]
[1]All states of Mexico recognize domestic marriages and consular marriages abroad.
[2]EU countries recognize other EU countries. Israel recognizes marriages of citizens who get married abroad. Aruba, Curaçao and Sint Maarten recognize the Netherlands proper. Beijing and Hong Kong grant residency to spouses of legal foreign residents.

Like it or not, the dictionary meaning of *marriage* has also changed in the last decades. Google, for instance, offers the following definition: "the legally or formally recognized union of two people as partners in a personal relationship (historically and in some jurisdictions specifically a union between a man and a woman)." The *Merriam-Webster* online dictionary defines *marriage* as "the state of being united as spouses in a consensual and contractual relationship recognized by law," but, apparently due to the ongoing debates, the compilers also felt compelled to add a *usage paragraph*: "The definition of the word *marriage*—or, more accurately, the understanding of what the institution of marriage properly consists of—continues to be highly controversial. This is not an issue to be resolved by dictionaries. Ultimately, the controversy involves cultural traditions, religious beliefs, legal rulings, and ideas about fairness and basic human rights. The principal point of dispute has to do with marriage between two people of the same sex, often referred to as *same-sex marriage* or *gay marriage* . . . The definition of *marriage* shown here is intentionally broad enough to encompass the different types of marriage that are currently recognized in varying cultures, places,

religions, and systems of law." The transformation is not exclusively etymological. In the United States, the 2015 Supreme Court decision *Obergefell v. Hodges* struck down laws banning same-sex marriage. "In contrast," *Wikipedia* informs, "34 countries (as of 2021) have definitions of marriage in their constitutions that prevent marriage between couples of the same sex, most enacted in recent decades as a preventative measure. Some other countries have constitutionally mandated Islamic law, which is generally interpreted as prohibiting marriage between same-sex couples. In six of the former and most of the latter, homosexuality itself is criminalized."[31]


Bans on same-sex unions by country or territory
No specific prohibition of same-sex marriages or unions
Constitution bans same-sex marriage
Constitution establishes Islamic law or bans violations of "Islamic morality"

[31] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Same-sex_marriage

Although he criticized the priests involved in gay marriages, on at least one occasion Srila Prabhupada introduced what appears as a sign of openness to the possibility: "Now the priestly order supporting homosex. I was surprised. They are going to pass resolution for getting married between man to man. The human society has come down to such a degraded position. It is astonishing. When I heard from Kīrtanānanda Mahārāja there is a big conference for passing this resolution . . .
In India still, if there somebody hears about homosex (makes sound of breathing out), 'Baaah' . . . Homosex is there, but nobody will support publicly, it is so abominable. People are coming down, and this is the subject matter for priestly order? It may be subject matter for the legislator, but priestly order, they are discussing for one week?" (Conversation with the GBC, Los Angeles, 25 May 1972) What exactly Srila Prabhupada meant by saying that gay marriage or homosexuality "may be subject matter for the legislator"? We may never exactly know. Unfortunately, no one in the conversation asked for clarification. I do not wish to extract too much from the indefinite statement, but it does seem that Srila Prabhupada hinted that the rights of homosexuals (including the right to marry?) could and perhaps should

be deliberated upon by lawmakers. Twenty-nine years after Srila Prabhupada's sibylline, cryptic words, in 2001 the Netherlands became the first country to legalize same-sex marriage. Providing a bunch of references, *Wikipedia* affirms: "Scientific studies show that the financial, psychological, and physical well-being of gay people are enhanced by marriage, and that the children of same-sex parents benefit from being raised by married same-sex couples within a marital union that is recognized by law and supported by societal institutions."[32] Despite these benefits, though, for the sake of comprehensiveness I should report that apparently not all is fine and dandy. Studies from the mid-2010s show that in the Netherlands, Sweden and Denmark homosexual suicide rates are still at least three times higher than those of heterosexuals. Legally recognized lesbian unions in the Netherlands are twice as likely to break up as legally recognized unions between gay men. In Great Britain they are two and a half times as likely.

[32] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Same-sex_marriage

Textual References & Personal Predilections

We live in a diverse and increasingly polarized world, with cultural and legislative attitudes moving in opposite directions. Nonetheless, polls consistently show rising support for the recognition of same-sex marriage in all developed democracies and in some developing democracies. In 2020 the *Pew Research Center* reported that "public opinion on the acceptance of homosexuality in society remains sharply divided by country, region and economic development," despite "increasing acceptance in many countries over past two decades."[33] But the mind accepts and rejects; and attitudes can shift back and forth through time. In 2019, for instance, *USA Today* reported that "Young people are growing less tolerant of LGBTQ individuals . . . The number of Americans 18 to 34 who are comfortable interacting with LGBTQ people slipped from 53% in 2017 to 45% in 2018 - the only age group to

[33] https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2020/06/25/global-divide-on-homosexuality-persists/

show a decline."[34] My observation - not the result of rigorous surveying but a perception gathered through multiple anecdotical events - is that ISKCON devotees tend to adopt the attitudes of the societies they live in. It's more likely, for instance, that Russian devotees be less accepting toward homosexuality than, say, Brazilian Vaisnavas. Having said that, sharp differences in mood may exist even within ISKCON members in the same country.

The Vaisnava reader may wonder: "What's the use of the opinion of the conditioned souls of Kali-yuga, the age of degradation?" Fair objection, I would have to say. Srila Prabhupada, in fact, makes the same point, using strong language:

Prabhupāda: They are passing resolution, homosex is passed, "All right." And in Perth you said that the students are discussing about homosex, in favor of homosex. So where is the ideal character? If you want something tangible business, train some people to become ideal character. That is this Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement.

[34] https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2019/06/24/lgbtq-acceptance-millennials-decline-glaad-survey/1503758001/

Director: What do you say... People say what ideal to you is not ideal to somebody else.

Prabhupāda: I am giving the example ideal character.

Director: Yeah, but that's one opinion.

Prabhupāda: No. It will not depend on opinion. Opinion, what is the value of opinion if the people are all asses? There is no opinion. One should take as it is enjoined in the *śāstra*. No opinion. What is the use of taking opinion of an ass? So the people are trained up just like dogs and asses, then what is the use of their opinion?

(Conversation with the Director of Research of the Department of Social Welfare, Melbourne, 21 May 1975)

I fully agree that we can't define what's desirable and beneficial for society based on the feelings and sensations of the general public, especially nowadays, when people generally lack spiritual training and are often addicted to debasing habits. As Srila Prabhupada puts it above: "One should take as it is enjoined in the *śāstra*. No opinion." So, the natural question would be: what the *śāstras* say about gay marriage? The answer: within the standard, canonical Gaudiya-vaisnava scriptures - such as *Bhagavad-gita* and *Srimad-Bhagavatam* - we don't find any specific reference

supporting or condemning same-sex marriage, which may create an epistemic impasse. The absence of evidence is no evidence at all. In other words, the fact that gay marriage is not mentioned in the principal Gaudiya scriptures doesn't necessarily mean that it's banned. At the same time, it doesn't necessarily mean that it's endorsed. Some devotees prefer a shortcut; they declare that all sex not meant for procreation is sinful and therefore gay marriage should be prohibited (but I consider this approach a naive oversimplification). It's a delicate issue; when something cannot be substantiated or ruled out by *śabda-pramāṇa*, Vedic evidence, we need to resort to other sources, such as *anumāna*, hypothesis, logic, or *pratyakṣa*, direct perception. These other processes, although not fully reliable, can also be applied through rigorous methods. Rational thinking should be applied with an open mind and a scrupulous discipline; and direct observation should be sustained by reliable, extensive data. Since it's not mentioned in our prominent *sastras*, would the need for same-sex marriage in society pass the test of reasonable analysis and empirical information? I believe it would, but readers can form their own opinion. According to *Wikipedia*, the *Kama-sutra* provides references to same-sex marriage. Obviously the *Kama-sutra* is not a text on a par

with the *Gita* or the *Bhagavatam,* but it remains as an important historical and cultural reference on traditional Indian values and standards: "The **Kama Sutra** is an ancient text dealing with *kama* or desire (of all kinds), which in Hindu thought is one of the four normative and spiritual goals of life. The Kama Sutra is the earliest extant and most important work in the Kama Shastra tradition of Sanskrit literature. It was compiled by the philosopher Vatsyayana . . . from earlier texts, and describes homosexual practices in several places, as well as a range of sex/gender 'types'. The author acknowledges that these relations also involve love and a bond of trust . . . The Second Part, Ninth Chapter of Kama Sutra specifically describes two kinds of men that we would recognize today as masculine- and feminine-type homosexuals . . . Such homosexual men were also known to marry, according to the Kama Sutra: 'There are also third-sex citizens, sometimes greatly attached to one another and with complete faith in one another, who get married together.' (KS 2.9.36). In the 'Jayamangala' of Yashodhara, an important twelfth-century commentary on the Kama Sutra, it is also stated: 'Citizens with this kind of homosexual inclination, who renounce women and can do without them willingly because they love one another, get married together, bound by a deep

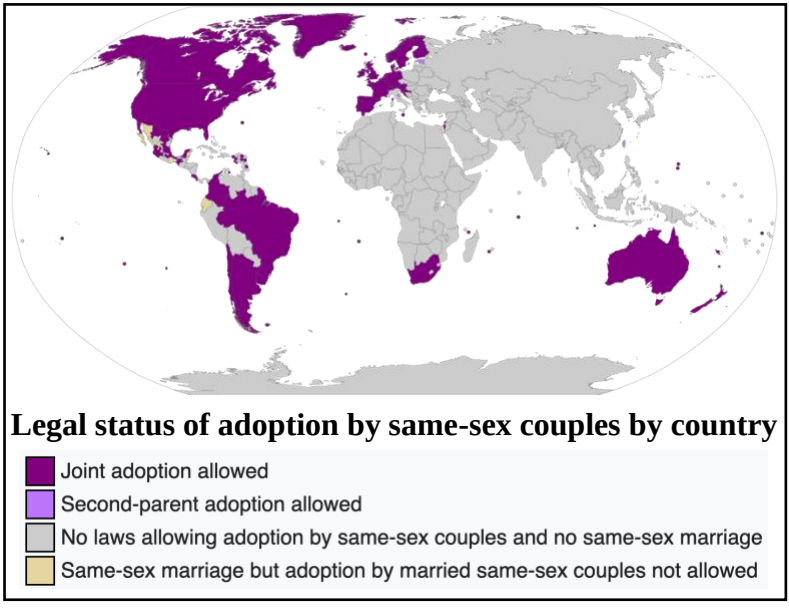
and trusting friendship.'"[35] My sense is that often devotees don't know what they are talking about when discussing homosexuality or gay-marriage. Often, they seem to assume that their beliefs and personal predilections must be self-evident ("I feel like that, therefore my opinion must be dharmic and sastric"). It appears that some devotees sustain and promote their subjective ideas presuming them to be automatically accurate, but without having done their homework; without having researched the tradition (and, in some cases, without showing a shred of compassion).

Same-sex Parenthood

Homosexuals can't produce children on their own but in dozens of countries they can adopt them. Wouldn't raising a Krishna conscious child within a stable, responsible, monogamous gay matrimony measure up to the same commitment within a heterosexual marriage? Srila Prabhupada said: "To become father and mother is not restricted. That is nature. You become father of hundreds children." (Lecture on Bg 7.7, Bombay, 1 April 1971) Isn't

[35] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hinduism_and_LGBT_topics

parental affection, emotional nurturing, and spiritual training the essence of Krishna conscious parenthood, regardless of the biology of conception? Isn't the raising of children in Krishna consciousness the quintessence of devotional motherhood and fatherhood? Many heterosexual Vaisnava couples adopt children, which they then fully consider as *their* children, offering the same love and affection as if they were biologically theirs.


Legal status of adoption by same-sex couples by country
Joint adoption allowed
Second-parent adoption allowed
No laws allowing adoption by same-sex couples and no same-sex marriage
Same-sex marriage but adoption by married same-sex couples not allowed

Same-sex marriage doesn't preclude the experience and expression of parenthood: "Joint adoption by same-sex couples is legal in twenty-seven countries . . . " *Wikipedia*

explains "Furthermore, some form of step-child adoption is legal for same-sex couples in five additional countries. Given that constitutions and statutes usually do not address the adoption rights of LGBT persons, judicial decisions often determine whether they can serve as parents either individually or as couples. Of states that permit same-sex marriage, most allow for joint adoption by those couples . . . Opponents of adoption by same-sex couples have argued that LGBT parenting adversely affects children. However, research consistently shows that gay and lesbian parents are as fit and capable as heterosexual parents, and their children are as psychologically healthy and well-adjusted as those reared by heterosexual parents."[36]

Homoerotism: Existing Since the Beginning of Creation

Let's now take a step back, back to the dawn of the universe. Lord Brahmā's service is to provide bodies to the various living entities according to the psychic state they had developed in previous editions of the cosmos. Some souls had built a solid disposition for dharmic deeds;

[36] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Same-sex_adoption#LGBT_parenting

others had acquired a strong taste for undignified pleasures. Brahma provides appropriate physical forms for both. The Third Canto *Bhagavatam* describes this periodic refitting of bodies to different souls: "He then created the chief demigods [*devatāḥ*], who were shining with the glory of goodness. He dropped before them the effulgent form of daytime, and the demigods sportingly took possession of it. Lord Brahmā then gave birth to the demons [*adevān*] from his buttocks, and they were very fond of sex. Because they were too lustful, they approached him for copulation." (SB 3.20.22-23) Perhaps due to their long sexual abstinence in between the creations, these guys were horny as hell. They jumped on the first available object of carnal pleasure; the body of Brahma. At this point, without addressing the homoerotic aspect of the situation, Srila Prabhupada makes a broad comment on the directly proportional relation between sexual fixation and spiritual debasement: "The more one is inclined to enjoy sex, the more he is degraded to the level of demoniac life." (SB 3.20.23, purport) Here Srila Prabhupada talks of sex in general. Sex of any flavor. As the aroused mob accosted him, Brahma at first laughed at the absurdity of the situation; but then, noting their resolution to rape him, he ran and took shelter in Krishna:

"My Lord, please protect me from these sinful demons, who were created by me under Your order. They are infuriated by an appetite for sex and have come to attack me." (SB 3.20.26)

At this point Srila Prabhupada drops the bomb. He makes a statement that millions of contemporary people would find unacceptable or even revolting. An affirmation that can be readily labeled as homophobic; a declaration clashing with predominant twenty-first-century moral, cultural, legal, social, and scientific canons. He writes: "[T]he homosexual appetite of a man for another man is demoniac and is not for any sane male in the ordinary course of life." (SB 3.20.26, purport) [37] The *apparent* meaning: all gays are sick demons. Or, at the very least, they are diseased and sinful individuals. But there is more than meets the eye. Vaisnava scholars have analyzed the Sanskrit, suggesting that these would-be rapists were actually attracted to the feminine aspect of Brahma's form. As the text evolves, it becomes clear that they were heterosexual or at most bisexual - certainly not simply homosexual. It has also been pointed out that there is a major ethical difference between consensual and non-consensual intercourse, a huge moral and juridical gap between mutually agreed-upon sex and sexually forcing oneself on someone - man, woman or, as in this case, demigod. The *Bhagavatam* here describes an attempt at

[37] In the original transcription of the purport, instead of "demoniac" we find "an aptitude of the demons"; but the meaning is the same.

gang rape, not just a proposition for coitus. Analyzing in detail the language and the implications of the passage, Hridayananda Maharaja (Dr. Howard J. Resnick) wrote a deep, insightful essay.[38] Although compelling and illuminating, the textual considerations on the true sexual orientation of these primordial brutes in one sense have little relevance to Srila Prabhupada's statement. His words go beyond the specific description of Brahma's misadventure with these naughty, butt-born ogres. Regardless of the Sanskrit subtleties, Srila Prabhupada's comment goes beyond the specific episode and sounds categorical and unconditional: "[T]he homosexual appetite of a man for another man is demoniac." The stark generalization needs analysis.

Is Homosexuality Intrinsically More "Demoniac"?

To be fair, Srila Prabhupada liberally christens also heterosexual attraction as *demoniac*. Just five verses after

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https://cdn.hdgoswami.com/uploads/20171101223453/essay_moral_theology__homosexuality.pdf?Submit=Download+Essay

the "homosexual appetite" comment, he writes, possibly on the same day: "The difference between demons and demigods is that a beautiful woman very easily attracts the minds of demons, but she cannot attract the mind of a godly person . . . Just as a child is attracted by a beautiful doll, similarly a demon, who is less intelligent and full of ignorance, is attracted by material beauty and an appetite for sex." (SB 3.20.31, purport) Apparently in Srila Prabhupada's moral universe both homosexual and heterosexual "appetite" qualify as "demoniac." In the purport he elaborates, focusing on the charms of the female form over the mind of the "demon": "The godly person knows that this nicely dressed and ornamented attraction of high breasts, high hips, beautiful nose and fair complexion is *māyā*. All the beauty a woman can display is only a combination of flesh and blood. Śrī Śaṅkarācārya has advised all persons not to be attracted by the interaction of flesh and blood; they should be attracted by the real beauty in spiritual life. The real beauty is Kṛṣṇa and Rādhā. One who is attracted by the beauty of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa cannot be attracted by the false beauty of this material world. That is the difference between a demon and a godly person or devotee." (SB 3.20.31, purport) Wow. So, here Srila Prabhupada seems to say that any man

sexually attracted to the body of a woman - and, by extension, every woman sexually attracted to the body of a man - is fundamentally a demon; a very... inclusive statement. An affirmation that appears to fly in the face of the fact that the almost totality of devotees do manifest degrees of sexual attraction and activity. They get married; they have children; etc. But, according to the literal meaning of this purport the whole human species - besides a few super-saints and some asexual people - is demoniac. (And asexual people have plenty of other opportunities to qualify as demoniac.) Srila Prabhupada's tone doesn't change in later verses of the chapter: "As moths at night surround a fire and are killed, so the demons become victims of the movements of the ball-like breasts of a beautiful woman. The scattered hair of a beautiful woman also afflicts the heart of a lusty demon." (SB 3.20.36, purport) This is an important caveat: in Srila Prabhupada's worldview all misuse of sexual energy is deplorable and degrading; not just homosexual behavior: "The symptoms of *rajo-guṇa* and *tamo-guṇa* are lust and greediness. Just like yesterday you told me the students are talking about homosex. That means *tamo-guṇa* . . . lusty desires very prominent, and how to fulfill, by homosex or sex with woman . . . So everyone in this material world

infected with this *tamo-guṇa*, all lusty desires, in various ways, varieties." (Morning Walk, Perth, 11 May 1975) Besides sex in its various manifestations, in this twentieth chapter of the Third Canto Srila Prabhupada also condemns as *demoniac* all non-devotional musical and dance performances: "Music and dancing employed in sense gratification are to be accepted as demoniac." (SB 3.20.38, purport) This would delegitimize - or rather literally *demonize* - the almost totality of humanity's performing arts. In summary, according to what he wrote in this chapter, for Srila Prabhupada all three activities comes under the label of demoniac: 1. "homosexual appetite of a man for another man"; 2. being heterosexually "attracted by material beauty and an appetite for sex"; 3. non-devotional "music and dancing." This appears to relativize and downsize the guilt of homosexuality. Gay attraction, after all, is just one among the various manifestations of material life. Also, such sweeping denunciations impel us to dig deeper into the significance of the word *demoniac* in Srila Prabhupada's lexicon.

What Srila Prabhupada Meant by "Demoniac"?

The inclusion of heterosexual attraction in the *demoniac* category should defuse and neutralize - at least to some extent - the radioactive effect of the "homosexual appetite" comment. At the same time, it raises other questions. Is Srila Prabhupada's moral compass, as expressed in this section of the *Bhagavatam*, unrealistically utopian? After all, he had been married and had fathered five children. At one point, long before the 1955 Hindu Marriage Act prohibited polygamy for Hindus, Srila Prabhupada considered getting a second wife. Was it all completely devoid of attraction to "material beauty and an appetite for sex" (which he describes as characteristics of "a demon")? Perhaps all his actions were performed out of duty or as a lesson for future generations - as in a drama? Who am I to say? At any rate, let's study his usage of the terms *demon* and *demoniac*. A search in the outstanding online resource Vanipedia.org - "a dynamic encyclopedia of Śrīla Prabhupāda's words (*vani*)" - reveals 3,173 entries for the word *demon* (in books, letters, lectures, etc.); 4,071 hits for *demons*; and 1,107 records for *demoniac*. Obviously,

Srila Prabhupada was *fond* of employing such words. Notwithstanding, he uses them with a broad gradation of meanings. In some cases, he describes practically everyone as demon, although to varying degrees: "One may be fifty percent demon, another may be eighty percent demon, but everyone in this material world is a demon." (Lecture on Bg 7.1, Los Angeles, 22 Feb 1969) "Here everyone is demon - everyone. Demon means they are busy for sense gratification. That is demon." (Conversation, Atlanta, 2 March 1975) On some occasions, in the spirit of inclusivity, he even lists himself in the category: "We are demons" (Lecture on Bg 16.7, Hyderabad, 14 Dec 1976) "We are all demons." (Lecture, Nairobi, 19 Sept 1971) In other cases, it takes a particular philosophical stand or dietary indiscretions for someone to qualify as a demon: "Atheists are called demons. In the Vedic literature, those who are atheist, they are called demons." (Lecture on Cc, *Madhya-lila*, 20.353-354, New York, 27 Dec 1966) "Meat-eating means he's demon." (Morning Walk, Los Angeles, 8 Dec 1973) In at least one case, it takes more debasing activities to qualify as demon: "These four qualifications must be there in a materialistic man: women-hunter and drunkard and flesh-eater and gambler. Wherever you find these four principles, they are demons." (Lecture on SB

7.9.10, Hawaii, 11 March 1969) In other cases, Srila Prabhupada defines as demons those actively antagonistic toward the devotees: "Demons means who harass saintly persons. That is the definition of demon." (Conversation, Los Angeles, 25 June 1972) So, from the wide-ranging to the particular, we find that Srila Prabhupada's definition of *demon* is quite flexible, from the all-encompassing to the specific. It's important to note that virtually all these definitions, all these shades of meaning, do not neatly fit most contemporary dictionary definitions of *demon*: "an evil spirit or devil, especially one thought to possess a person or act as a tormentor in hell." (Google) "*mythology*: a supernatural being whose nature is intermediate between that of a god and that of a human being." (Merriam-Webster) "a person considered extremely wicked, evil, or cruel." (Dictionary.com) Wikipedia elaborates: "A demon is a malevolent supernatural being . . . In Ancient Near Eastern religions and in the Abrahamic traditions, including ancient and medieval Christian demonology, a demon is considered a harmful spiritual entity which may cause demonic possession, calling for an exorcism." [39] Whereas Srila Prabhupada calls *demon* basically every gross materialist,

[39] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Demon

any run-of-the-mill sense gratifier uninterested or even superficially interested in God, the contemporary English language depicts *demons* as mystical, mythical, supernatural, devilish being. Quite a difference. As a result, when Srila Prabhupada writes: "[T]he homosexual appetite of a man for another man is demoniac," modern sensitivities may interpret it as meaning that all gays are evil, horribly aberrant, and devilish beings. Instead, especially in the overall context of the chapter, I believe it could be legitimate to *translate* Srila Prabhupada's words (in his purports to SB 3.20.26 & 31) as something like: "The desire of a man to seek pleasure by penetrating the rectal cavity of another man or by being himself sodomized, doesn't qualify as a godly, divine desire." (With which, I hope, even honest gays would agree.) "Also not godly are the heterosexual longings of a man for the composition of muscles, bones and other tissues arranged in the female human form." An analogy comes to mind: one exacerbating factor in the tensions between the United States and Iran is the common Iranian description of America as "The Great Satan" (Persian: شیطان بزرگ - *Shaytân-e Bozorg*). The epithet is certainly a substantial insult; at the same time, it's worsened by the different renderings of *Satan* in American and Iranian culture. In

English, *Satan* is the Devil himself, the fullest personification of evil, the master of hell. In Persian (Farsi) the definition of *Satan* is more nuanced, involving a strong connotation of deception, seduction and beguiling. The meaning is similar to: "America the Great Deceiver" (an epithet that those aware of America's twentieth century's involvement in the region may find historically accurate...). In other words, what Srila Prabhupada calls *demoniac* does not precisely correspond to common usage; and therefore the effect of the word on contemporary minds might be stronger than intended.

Did Srila Prabhupada Consider Homosexuality a Disease?

The sagacious reader may wonder, "OK, perhaps, to some extent, you have addressed the issue of the *demoniac homosexual appetite*; but Srila Prabhupada also writes 'homosexual appetite . . . is not for any sane male.' Did Srila Prabhupada consider homosexuality a disease?"

"First of all," I would reply, "let's put things in their historical context. In Srila Prabhupada's times, specifically

when he dictated that purport, that was the prominent clinical interpretation. The contemporary, average western person had almost a half-a-century to adjust to the idea that homosexuality is not a mental disease, but a normal human condition." For instance, in its 2009 report "Appropriate Therapeutic Responses to Sexual Orientation," the *American Psychological Association* (APA) affirms that "The longstanding consensus of the behavioral and social sciences and the health and mental health professions is that homosexuality per se is a normal and positive variation of human sexual orientation."[40]

But not everyone agrees, of course. In the US, the *National Center for Biological Information* (NCBI), for example, hosts on its site a 2015 paper from the official journal of the Catholic Medical Association that challenges the APA's conclusion and methodology: "The American Psychiatric Association and the American Psychological Association have suggested for many years now that there is significant empirical evidence supporting the claim that homosexuality is a normal variant of human sexual orientation as opposed to a mental disorder. This paper summarizes and analyzes that purported scientific

[40] https://www.apa.org/pi/lgbt/resources/therapeutic-response.pdf

evidence and explains that much (if not all) of the evidence is irrelevant and does not support the homosexuality-is-not-a-mental-disorder claim . . . This article suggests that instead of supporting their claim with scientific evidence, those major medical associations arbitrarily label homosexuality as normal."[41] The above-mentioned APA report includes a short account of the shifting attitudes of mental-health professionals: "[I]n the middle of the 19th century . . . same-sex eroticism and gender-nonconforming behaviors came under increased medical and scientific scrutiny . . . scientists, social critics, and physicians sought to make sense of what was previously defined as sin or crime (Katz, 1995). This shift to a scientific approach did not challenge the underlying social values, however, and thus continued to reflect the existing sexual stigma, discrimination, criminalization, and heterosexism. Much of the medical and scientific work at that time conceptualized homosexual attractions and behaviors as abnormal or as an illness (Katz, 1995). In that era, homosexuality was predominantly viewed as either a criminal act or a medical problem, or both (Krafft-Ebing, 1886/1965). Homosexuality was seen as caused by psychological immaturity . . . or pathology . . . These

[41] https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4771012/

perspectives on homosexuality lasted into the first half of the 20th century, shaping the views of psychoanalysis, the dominant psychiatric paradigm of that time." In its 1952 "Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders" (DSM), the *American Psychiatric Association* listed homosexuality as a sociopathic personality disturbance. The DSM listed homosexuality as a category of disorder until May 1974, six years after Srila Prabhupada had dictated his "homosexual appetite . . . is not for any sane male" purport. In other words, at the time he expressed it, Srila Prabhupada's indication of homosexuality as a disorder were consistent with authoritative, contemporary secular experts on mental illness. In 1973 the APA trustees had voted (13 to 0, with two abstentions) to remove homosexuality as a disorder. The decision was confirmed in 1974, by 58% of the general APA membership, who voted to replace the "disorder" diagnosis with the milder category of "sexual orientation disturbance." Obviously, attitudes didn't change overnight, especially internationally. For instance, in May 1975 Srila Prabhupada was in Australia, talking with the local Director of Research of the *Department of Social Welfare*. This government officer declared: "Homosexual is a sickness . . . It's an illness." (Conversation, Melbourne, 21 May 1975)

In other words, in the early 1970's psychiatrists and government agencies believed that "homosexual appetite . . . is not for any sane male." Scientists of his time shared Srila Prabhupada's view. Discriminating twenty-first century readers should keep that in mind when tempted to summarily brand Srila Prabhupada as a homophobe.

Perception of Homosexuality through History

For the big picture, it's important to grasp how homosexuals have been viewed throughout the world, in different time periods. To avoid significantly increasing the size of this book, I won't include the full article "Timeline of Gay World History,"[42] from the site of the *Gay & Lesbian Vaishnava Association* (GALVA).[43] From 10,000-year-old rock paintings in Zimbabwe depicting gay sex, to the 2020 ban of same-sex marriage in the Russian constitution, the fast-paced, bullet-point documentation illuminates the rollercoaster of morphing social and legal

[42] https://www.galva108.org/single-post/2014/05/08/a-timeline-of-gay-world-history
[43] https://www.galva108.org

attitudes towards homosexuality. Countries such as China have moved from general acceptance to persecution and then back to acceptance. Other countries have gradually gone from criminalization to decriminalization and then to recognition of gay marriages; but the trend of the planet hasn't been, and is not, uniform; not all places move in the same direction or at the same speed. Traditionally the Christian and Islamic nations tried for centuries to stamp out and repress homosexuality (obviously unsuccessfully). As a general trend, the Christian world gradually, in the late centuries, enforced milder punishments, then completely revoked "sodomy laws," and then finally, in many cases, formally recognized gay unions; however, some Islamic countries increasingly adopted harsher punishments. For instance, in 2019, Brunei, in Southeast Asia, adopted death penalty by stoning for homosexual acts. It's revealing that the criminalization and persecution of gays substantially increased under tyrants such as Hitler, Stalin, and Mao Zedong. I found amusing the reports of apparently perplexed Western explorers witnessing for the first time the homosexual practices of local populations in faraway lands, from Benin and Namibia in Africa; to Quebec and Louisiana in North America; to New Zealand and so on. And often homosexuality wasn't just a custom

of common mortals: gods of Greece and Egypt, for example, did not disdain gay unions either. Let's keep the big picture in mind. As a species, *homo sapiens sapiens* only relatively recently has been trying to understand homosexuality through scientific (or pseudoscientific) methods. We are still very much in the middle of a broad, species-wide, cultural, clinical and legal transition from a time in which attitudes and legislation were dictated by official Judeo-Christian or Islamic beliefs, by subjective assumptions on morality, and by a number of conflicting socio-political forces. What about India? One of the central theses of this book is that Srila Prabhupada might have absorbed some of the outlooks predominant in his cultural environment, his historical period. Exploring such attitudes is therefore essential to our analysis.

Perceptions of Homosexuality in India

It turns out that ancient India displayed a tradition of openness, tolerance and even, to some extent, permissiveness towards sexuality in its many forms. The section "India's Slow Descent Into Homophobia" in the

Gay & Lesbian Vaishnava Association's website [44] summarizes thousands of years of history: "Ancient India's acceptance and accommodation of many forms of eroticism within its culture, including homoeroticism, has been well documented in early Sanskrit writings, art and architecture. This makes modern-day India's sexual puritanism and homophobia, which reached its zenith in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, all the more astounding." [45] *Wikipedia* states that "Same-sex relations and gender variance have been represented within Hinduism from Vedic times through to the present day, in rituals, law books, mythical narratives, commentaries, paintings, and sculpture." However, "The extent to which these representations embrace or reject homosexuality has been disputed within the religion as well as outside of it."[46] The GALVA text continues, saying that in the Vedic age, before Kali-yuga, "many forms of sexuality are

[44] I am aware that not everyone accepts all contents on this site as authoritative; I too find some of the statements debatable; nonetheless, I do consider it a valuable resource for anyone interested in the subject.

[45] https://www.galva108.org/single-post/2014/05/09/indias-slow-descent-into-homophobia

[46] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hare_Krishna_movement_and_sexual_orientation

accommodated within India's native culture such as polygamy, prostitution, sexually explicit art, courtesans, etc." The *Bhagavatam*, for instance, describes Lord Krishna's entrance in His city, Dvārakā, and how prostitutes - hundreds of them (*vāramukhyāś ca śataśo*) - came to lovingly greet Him. The translation of *vāramukhyāḥ* as "well-known prostitutes" has been debated, as the term not only indicates royal courtesans and leading harlots, but also singers and dancers. Regardless of what exactly the *Bhagavatam* meant by that word, Srila Prabhupada, demonstrating both the broadmindedness and the pragmatism of the Vedic ethos, writes in the purport: "Even to date there are many prostitutes in great cities of India who are sincere devotees of the Lord . . . It is understood herewith that even in those days, about five thousand years ago, there were prostitutes in a city like Dvārakā, where Lord Kṛṣṇa resided. This means that prostitutes are necessary citizens for the proper upkeep of society. The government opens wine shops, but this does not mean that the government encourages the drinking of wine. The idea is that there is a class of men who will drink at any cost . . . Similarly, men who are not satisfied at home require such concessions, and if there is no prostitute, then such low

men will induce others into prostitution. It is better that prostitutes be available in the marketplace so that the sanctity of society can be maintained. It is better to maintain a class of prostitutes than to encourage prostitutes within society. The real reformation is to enlighten all people to become devotees of the Lord, and that will check all kinds of deteriorating factors of life." (SB 1.11.19, purport) In other words, the various forms of extramarital sex are indeed "deteriorating factors"; but, because of the contaminated status of some of its members, society requires "concessions." The acts thus authorized, for certain classes, as concessions, are still sinful, but promote regulation. Going to prostitutes is still unholy, but it's better than the alternative: lusty men corrupting innocent girls and married women. The Vedic approach to social ills is not to impose indiscriminate, draconian prohibitions, but "to enlighten all people to become devotees of the Lord." Veda means knowledge; Vedic means based on knowledge; knowledge implies both a realistic estimate of the capacity of different types of citizens for godly behavior and awareness of the progressive, gradual steps required for their purification. The next step may involve a phase of unholiness that, nonetheless, represents an improvement, as it fosters

restraint of the mind and senses. Srila Prabhupada continues in the purport: "It appears that the prostitutes of Dvārakā, who were so eager to meet the Lord, were all His unalloyed devotees, and thus they were all on the path of salvation . . . Therefore, the only reformation that is necessary in society is to make an organized effort to turn the citizens into devotees of the Lord." One mistake that some immature, neophyte devotees tend to make is to wish to impose the present standards of initiated ISKCON devotees on society at large. The mature Vaisnavas, though, look for ways to *minimize* sin; they do not utopianly try to uproot it completely: "If you say that, 'You are restraining us from meat-eating,' no, we don't restrain you." Srila Prabhupada says, "We simply request you that 'Don't kill. When the cow is dead, you eat it . . . Don't kill, don't maintain the slaughterhouse.' It's very sinful. It has got very awkward reaction on the society. Stop this slaughterhouse. We don't say that you stop eating meat. You eat meat, but don't take it from slaughterhouse . . . how long the cow will live? . . . So wait for that much time. Then you regularly get dead cows and eat." (Conversation, Paris, 11 June 1974) A couple of months before, Srila Prabhupada was speaking in the same vein: "Similarly, drunkards. You cannot stop them, 'Don't

drink.' They'll not hear you. Therefore restriction, 'Yes, you can drink, after offering to the Devī,' and that means restriction." (Morning Walk, Bombay, 29 March 1974) The same standard of wisdom, compassion and pragmatism should be applied to sexuality.

Back to Indian history: the Islamic invasions produced a major political and cultural shockwave. India had been the land of Khajuraho and of *Kama-sutra*, but, after a period of relative harmony, some of the Muslim rulers started to impose their views on sexuality in general and homosexuality in particular. For instance, they introduced the Middle Eastern practice of castrating homosexual slaves and servants. The leaders of the Mughal Empire, established in 1526, ended the peaceful coexistence between Hindus and Muslims. They enforced harsh "anti-pagan" codes; they forcibly converted or killed Hindus; they plundered villages, demolished temples, and destroyed Deities. They also began persecuting homosexuals. Gay acts were punished by either flagellation or death - death by stoning, crushing under a wall, or throwing down from a high point. But it wasn't only the colonizing middle-easterners that objected to the leniency of the Indian world in matters of sexuality. In 1757, the

Men engaged in homosexual behavior, exterior of the Kandariya Mahadeva temple (1025-1050 AD), Khajuraho, India.

British East India Company became the dominant trading organization in India, gradually gaining more and more political and military influence on the subcontinent. The GALVA text continues: "At this time in Christian England and Europe, the criminalization of homosexuality has reached its peak and 'unnatural fornication' is routinely punished by hanging or garroting both men and women .

. . in 1858, India is officially incorporated into the British Empire. Two years later, the anti-sodomy law of 1860 is enforced upon the entire empire that now includes India. The law . . . reads: 'Whoever voluntarily has carnal intercourse against the order of nature with any man, woman or animal, shall be punished with imprisonment for life, or with imprisonment of either description for a term which may extend to ten years, and shall be liable to fine.'" Previously in Great Britain homosexuality had been punished by hanging, and so this law was a progressive action, but in Hindu culture homosexuality wasn't persecuted in that way. "Also during this time, puritan scholars translate India's Sanskrit texts into English but omit or hide any reference to homosexuality because it is shocking to them." Colonial academics weren't too interested to learn from the Vedic tradition, which they considered backward or even barbarian. They were often much more interested in demonstrating the supremacy of their Christian morality. "In 1947, after considerable struggle through civil disobedience, India achieves political independence, and the British Empire is dismantled. However, as a country, India is culturally scarred in many ways. Most Indians believe that their ancient Hindu culture is inferior to modern Western

Man performs fellatio, Lakshmana temple (930-950 AD), Khajuraho, India.

civilization. They take their heritage to be something shameful and worth abandoning. Mahatma Gandhi, educated in England, sends squads of his disciples to smash the erotic representations on the ancient temples of Khajuraho and Chapri. Only the poet, Rabindranath Tagore, manages to stop them. Pandit Nehru attempts to halt the publishing of photographs that depict sculptures showing homosexual relations, claiming that such vices are due to Western influence. In fact, it is his own perception of vice that has been influenced by the West . . . In 1967, the United Kingdom repeals its outdated anti-sodomy

laws, effectively decriminalizing homosexuality for all of its citizens. India, on the other hand, continued to cling to such laws without considering its own native culture or traditions." It would take another half a century, till 2018, for the Supreme Court of India to decriminalize homosexual relations. In other words, India had achieved political independence, but had maintained a degree of cultural, psychological and legislative dependence on the viewpoints of the *mlecchas*. They had expelled the foreigner invaders but had kept some of their prejudices. "Imposed labels upon homosexuality such as 'deviant' or 'unnatural' are of relatively very recent origin in India and not rooted in traditional Vedic or Hindu thought. Indeed, the very inventors of these labels, Euro-American psychologists, have already retracted them."

Srila Prabhupada appeared in 1896, in Calcutta, the then capital of the British Indian empire. Victoria was still "Queen of the United Kingdom and Empress of India." She died in 1901. As a nine-year old, Srila Prabhupada, saw Victoria's grandson, the future King George V, who visited Calcutta in December 1905: "We were at that time children." Srila Prabhupada reminisces, "So I think King George V, when he was Prince of Wales . . . I have seen.

We were schoolchildren at that time. So on the two sides of the road, our first place was, the king, queen passed. We saw. We were given a flag. (laughter) *'Jaya Rāja, Rājeśvara'* . . . And very good tiffin was supplied: two *samosā*, two *kachorī*, two *sandeśa*, and one big tangerine. Twice I saw. Once when he entered Calcutta, and again, one day, when there was a parade of military. Military parade. So both days we were invited, and we saw the king." (Morning Walk, London, 11 March 1975)

Victoria Memorial, Calcutta (Kolkata), December 1921

During the same conversation, Srila Prabhupada told that once, while they were building it, he had climbed the Victoria Memorial: "That was built in memory of Victoria. It was done imitating the Taj Mahal. It took twenty years . . . when it was being constructed, I went to the top by

crossing the scaffolding." This is just to show how intertwined Srila Prabhupada's younger days were with the British Raj. How much of their attitudes toward sexuality seeped into his young mind? We will never know for sure; but the question remains.

The Third Gender

An article in the New York Times states: "When the British colonized India in the mid-19th century, they brought a strict sense of judgment to sexual mores, criminalizing 'carnal intercourse against the order of nature.' That was the beginning, scholars say, of a mainstream discomfort in India with homosexuality, transgender people and hijras."[47] Cultural tensions had occasionally manifested also in previous centuries. *Wikipedia* reports an instance of uneasiness with and condemnation of the third gender by western visitors: "Franciscan travelers in the 1650s noted the presence of 'Men and boys who dress like women' roaming the streets of Thatta, in modern Pakistan. The presence of these individuals was taken to be a sign of

[47] https://www.nytimes.com/2018/02/17/style/india-third-gender-hijras-transgender.html

the city's depravity."[48] Srila Prabhupada was aware of the presence of the hijras, the third gender, and of how its members had been harmoniously incorporated within Indian society. In the conversation reported below, Srila Prabhupada describes how some of them attended the celebrations for the birth of Lord Caitanya. In that exchange Srila Prabhupada appears tentative in describing them, which is understandable, as the category includes eunuchs, intersex and transgender people, and therefore the challenge in finding a single, encompassing definition. Srila Prabhupada also appears surprised (audio available[49]) upon hearing (perhaps for the first time?) about hermaphrodites:

Prabhupāda: Lord Caitanya's mother, Śacīdevī, is sitting underneath a tree . . . And the little child on her lap, and . . . so many visitors are coming, and they are offering some presentation. Somebody is offering gold necklace, somebody offering some bangles, some cloth, some money, and . . . Jagannātha Miśra, His father. He was, whatever money and clothes and gold and silver they were

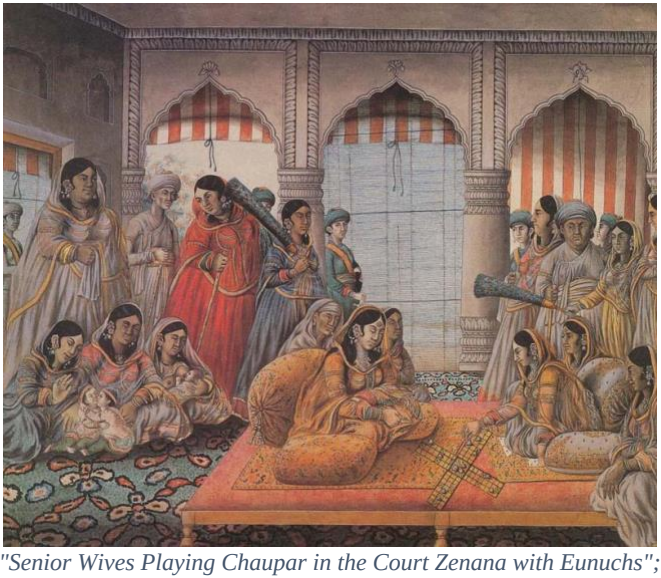
[48] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hijra_(South_Asia)
[49] https://vanisource.org/wiki/670405-6_-_Conversation_on_Lord_Caitanya_Play_-_San_Francisco

coming, he was also distributing to poor men, some dancers. In India there is a system... what do you call? The eunuchs? Those who are neither male or female. What do you call? What is their name?
Hayagrīva: A combination of both, male and female?
Prabhupāda: Yes.
Hayagrīva: A hermaphrodite. A hermaphrodite.
Prabhupāda: Eunuchs, what is that eunuch?
Hayagrīva: A eunuch is...
Prabhupāda: Feminine.
Hayagrīva: Impotent, an impotent... someone who's been castrated.
Prabhupāda: Oh, that is called eunuch. By nature, neither man, neither woman.
Hayagrīva: Oh, this is also called asexual, that is to say no sex.
Prabhupāda: No sex.
Hayagrīva: Hermaphroditic means they have the physical features of both man and woman.
Prabhupāda: Oh. At the same time?
Hayagrīva: At the same time.
Prabhupāda: I do not exactly... but such people, they have their own society, and their means of living is that whenever there is some good occasion, a marriage or

childbirth, like that, so they go there and pray to God that, 'This child may be very long living.' In this way they make some prayer and get some [charity]...
Hayagrīva: These people . . . And these asexual people...
Prabhupāda: They are dancing.
Hayagrīva: They are dancing.
(Conversation on Lord Caitanya Play, San Francisco, 5 April 1967)

Wikipedia reports ancient Indian accounts of the third gender's presence: "Hijras have a recorded history in the Indian subcontinent since antiquity, as suggested by the *Kama Sutra* . . . In some versions of the *Ramayana*, when Rama leaves Ayodhya for his 14-year exile, a crowd of his subjects follow him into the forest because of their devotion to him. Soon Rama notices this, and gathers them to tell them not to mourn, and that all the 'men and women' of his kingdom should return to their places in Ayodhya. Rama then leaves and has adventures for 14 years. When he returns to Ayodhya, he finds that the hijras, being neither men nor women, have not moved from the place where he gave his speech. Impressed with their devotion, Rama grants hijras the boon to confer blessings on people during auspicious inaugural occasions like

childbirth and weddings . . . The *Mahabharata* includes an episode in which Arjuna, a hero of the epic, is sent into an exile. There he assumes an identity of a eunuch-transvestite and performs rituals during weddings and childbirths that are now performed by hijras."[50]



"Senior Wives Playing Chaupar in the Court Zenana with Eunuchs"; Mughal, Lucknow, ca. 1790.

Writing in *Sri Caitanya-caritamrita* about the celebrations for Lord Caitanya's birth, Srila Prabhupada says: "[I]n India still there are professional dancers, blessers and singers, all

[50] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hijra_(South_Asia)

of whom assemble together during householder ceremonies, especially marriages and birth ceremonies. These professional men earn their livelihood by taking charity on such occasions from the homes of the Hindus. Eunuchs also take advantage of such ceremonies to receive charity. That is their means of livelihood. Such men never become servants or engage themselves in agriculture or business occupations; they simply take charity from neighborhood friends to maintain themselves peacefully." (Cc, *Adi-lila*, 13.106, purport) At present, perhaps due to the degeneration of the culture and the decline of the economy, many hijras, besides begging and blessing, to survive also engage in prostitution. About half a century ago Srila Prabhupada's wrote that they "maintain themselves peacefully"; but those words have since become obsolete. Contrast Srila Prabhupada's depiction of social acceptance and integration of the hijra with the British approach: "Beginning in the 1850s with the British Raj, colonial authorities deployed various strategies to eradicate hijras, whom they saw as 'a breach of public decency.' The British viewed hijras as incapable of 'moral transformation' and assimilation and therefore subjected them to eliminatory policies . . . The hijra were included in the Criminal Tribes Act (1871) and labelled a 'criminal

tribe', now subjected to compulsory registration, strict monitoring and stigmatized." [51] Nonetheless, in more recent times, Nepal, Pakistan, India and Bangladesh have all legally accepted the existence of a third gender, with India, Pakistan and Nepal including an option for them on passports and certain official documents. In what has been considered a landmark 2014 ruling, the Indian Supreme Court ordered the government to recognize hijras as the third gender and grant them the status of a socially and economically backward class, which allows them to avail of quotas in admissions and jobs. The Supreme Court later clarified that the ruling doesn't apply to lesbians, gays and bisexuals, who therefore are not legally accepted as third gender in India. This standpoint might contribute to reconcile the (possibly puzzling) divergence between Srila Prabhupada's acceptance of the hijras as a normal feature of the Indian social and religious scene, and his apparent repudiation of homosexuality.

Wherefrom Srila Prabhupada Got His Outlook on Homosexuality?

[51] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hijra_(South_Asia)

We can't exactly determine if or how much Srila Prabhupada's views on sexuality (and homosexuality) were influenced by Victorian puritanism (possibly through his professors at Scottish Church College?), by his family's cultural heritage, by his contemporary mainstream Bengali and Indian culture, or by his reading of *sastras*. He grew up in a conservative and even prudish world. We don't expect that during Srila Prabhupada's early years the topics of sexuality - what to speak of homosexuality - would be discussed at the dinner table or in school. For instance, Srila Prabhupada said about his wife that, at the time of their marriage, "She did not know what is sex." (Conversation, London, 15 Aug 1971) During Srila Prabhupada's childhood and early youth there wasn't any mass media as we know it. There was no radio (the first radio station in Calcutta started in 1923, when he was 27) - and in any case the broadcasts wouldn't be about gay or sexual themes. The first Calcutta cinema hall - *Elphinstone Picture Palace* - opened in 1907, and till 1920 all movies were silent. Perhaps more importantly, up to 1923, 70% of Indian movies were of the devotional genre. Television wasn't even on the horizon during most of Srila Prabhupada's adult life: it started in India, with an experimental telecast, on 15 September 1959 (incidentally,

two days before Srila Prabhupada's taking *sannyasa*). Daily TV transmission began in 1965 (the year he left for America). Internet became publicly available in India in 1995 - 18 years after Srila Prabhupada's disappearance. It was a different world during Srila Prabhupada formative years. Who spoke about these things? It wasn't like today, in which you check the news on your mobile phone and, frequently, you read about the supreme court of this or that country deliberating on gay marriage; or you hear about the gay pride parade coming to a city near you. (While we are on the subject: in 1999, 22 years after Srila Prabhupada's demise, Kolkata became the first Indian city to host a gay pride march.) And what to speak of porn? Today anyone, including children, can visit any of the millions of sites displaying all forms of sexual permutations.

We might tend to believe that Srila Prabhupada's outlook on homosexuality came directly from the scriptures; and we can find some support for this conclusion. The *Manu-samhita* states that homosexual intercourse is a sin, although not a great sin (not a *mahā-pātaka*). *Pātaka* literally means "that which causes a fall-down." Any form of sex outside marriage and/or not intended for

procreation carries with it some degree of pollution, some increase in bodily identification, some aspect of servitude to the material senses - and, in some cases, even some form of exploitation of others. And so, yes, ultimately the men and women wishing to go back home, back to Godhead, at one point would have to master their sex drive; either that drive be heterosexual, homosexual, bisexual or whatever. In discouraging and condemning slavery to lust, Srila Prabhupada acted as the real friend of humanity, and his strong words can be taken as the affectionate warnings of a loving preceptor. Even eating, say, a boiled potato without offering it first to Vishnu is sinful, but it's a tiny little sin; one that doesn't devastate one's consciousness. It is *sinful* if two homosexuals consensually engage in physical intimacy, but, sastrically and colloquially speaking, it's not a big deal. Just like it's not a big deal if a married heterosexual couple has (consensual) sex without trying to conceive. Many sincere devotees commit some minor sin in their lives. It's not "OK," but it's neither the end of the world nor the end of their spiritual life. Spiritual perfection, pure Krishna-*prema* will manifest as disinterest, and even disgust, with genital pleasures; but for most human beings, including practicing Vaisnavas, that's down the line; and certainly not something that can be enforced

artificially or prematurely. We have seen dozens of men taking *sannyasa*, formally and ceremoniously renouncing all sex, only to revert to active sex life years or months later. Such Pindaric flights hurt the attempting fliers as well as the rest of society. For many of us, sex desire is a bad, ugly beast; one not so easy to tame by sheer determination. The *Bhagavatam* shows that even great yogis may succumb to sex, at least occasionally. Am I saying that because sex it's one of the most powerful material drives, we should supinely surrender to it? No, not at all. All I am saying is that it's statistically expected that for most humans (of any sexual orientation) transcending sexual involvement will be a gradual process, one that should be undertaken rigorously but realistically, seriously but not artificially, earnestly but not neurotically. And we should not criticize our fellow travelers (of any sexual orientation) for not having yet reached the destination. *Physician heal thyself* - Srila Prabhupada often quoted: "Caitanya Mahāprabhu said that, 'Before becoming preacher, before endeavoring yourself to do good to others, you just perfect yourself.' 'Physician, heal thyself.' Physician, you are yourself diseased. How you can become a physician?" (Lecture on Cc, *Adi-lila* 7.80-95, San Francisco, 10 Feb 1967) Better to focus on our own frailties

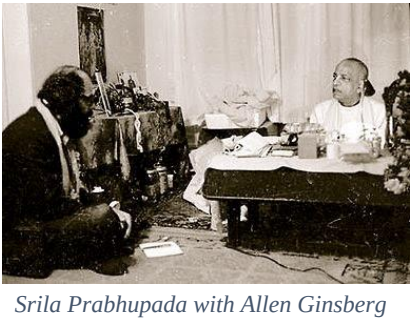
and on our purification than obsess over the sex lives of others - as kinky voyeurs would.

As supposedly performing the brahminical role in society, I believe ISKCON should focus on improving the stability of homosexual relationships through legal marriage vows and matrimonial counselling - without trying to delegitimize or obliterate such natural human emotional connections. Vaisnava *brahmanas*, especially when consulted, have a moral obligation to help heterosexual couple live a harmonious, progressive life in all the aspects of their relation: emotional, physical, sexual, financial, social, and so on. The same brahminical duty to offer holistic guidance applies also to gay couples. The alternative is becoming irrelevant and adharmic, wrapped up in bigotry, prejudice, and unjustified discrimination.

How Did Srila Prabhupada Treat Homosexuals?

Srila Prabhupada disciple Amara Das Wilhelm, in his article *Srila Prabhupada and the Gays,* writes:

"Over the past few years it has become commonplace for devotees to depict Srila Prabhupada as very hateful and condemning of gays. What a great disservice this has been to His Divine Grace! I suspect this is more a reflection of the mentality of such devotees themselves, and not that of Srila Prabhupada. As far as I have seen, Srila Prabhupada's exchanges with homosexual friends and disciples were always exceptionally loving and kind. Indeed, he was quite caring toward them and displayed a great deal of concern that they feel welcome and included in his Krsna consciousness movement . . . Devotees seem obsessed only with the sexual aspect of homosexuality, while failing to address the more important human and personal considerations . . . Srila Prabhupada met many times with Allen Ginsberg, who was sometimes accompanied by his lover, Peter Orlovsky. Do you know how nicely and politely Srila Prabhupada received them? Do you think he called them demons and accused them of having illicit sex together? No. Srila Prabhupada's mind was never in the gutter like that. His concern was for their Krsna



Srila Prabhupada with Allen Ginsberg

consciousness, how to make them feel welcome in his temple, and how best to engage them in Krsna's service. The same interaction was evident in Srila Prabhupada's dealings with disciples like Sudama Maharaja and Upendra Prabhu. He was always very concerned and caring for them. They felt his love so strongly that it changed their hearts and lives forever! It is these loving dealings between Srila Prabhupada and gays that convince me he would eventually have allowed for some type of concession regarding gay marriage."

Srila Prabhupada with Sudama Maharaja

Here Amara Prabhu makes a compelling point. Srila Prabhupada was a practical person, always willing to adopt

ways and means that would further his Krishna consciousness movement and help people come close to Krishna. In the absolute absence of a categorical prohibition in *sastra*, I don't see why Srila Prabhupada, if he were with us today, wouldn't formally approve and endorse stability in gay relations through civic unions. After all, isn't just a detail? We have seen Srila Prabhupada's being flexible in matter of social arrangements. For instance, when he created the Governing Body Commission (GBC) in 1970, he established that *sannyasis* shouldn't serve as GBC members. Their function would be different; they "will travel to our different centers for preaching purpose as well as enlightening the members of the center for spiritual advancement." (Direction of Management, 28 July 1970) No administration for them. That arrangement was in keeping with the traditional *varnasrama* role of *sannyasis*. But just a couple of years later Srila Prabhupada changed the arrangement and instituted that *sannyasis* could also serve as GBCs. If such a momentous alteration, dealing with the prerequisites for membership in the highest Body of ISKCON leadership, was done in two years, why should we imagine that after fifty years of experience, in a changed world, Srila Prabhupada wouldn't authorize

same-sex marriage? But back to the *Srila Prabhupada and the Gays* essay: "It's plain commonsense that monogamy is superior to promiscuity for anyone unable to follow complete celibacy . . . And while Srila Prabhupada initially experimented in marrying gay men to women, often without the wife's knowledge, I think it's fair to say we have all seen the unrealistic nature and failure of such experiments, however well intended . . . If we study the transcendental examples of Srila Prabhupada's dealings with gay people very carefully, keep note of them, and imbibe them into our own lives and character, then we can truly become bona fide followers and representatives of His Divine Grace. Otherwise we cannot. If we are able to display the same loving and caring attitude that Prabhupada himself embodied, only then will our preaching be inspiring and effective . . . If any devotees are harboring deep hatred or dislike for any of God's creatures, I beg them to please abandon it immediately. Do not act upon this lower nature because it will only grow and increase. Displays of hatred and contempt for others only anger the guru and stain the entire Gaudiya Vaishnava tradition. Instead, like Srila Prabhupada, we

must become emblems of love and compassion for all." [52] Srila Prabhupada always stated that everyone can become a devotee, from any background or present behavior. Every soul has *bhakti,* deep in the heart and he welcomed *everyone* to join his movement, with no prejudice: "Lord Jesus Christ said that, 'You hate the sin, not the sinner.' Not the sinner. This is very nice . . . So this Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement is so nice that there is no question of hating. Everyone is welcome." (Lecture on Bg 6.6-12, Los Angeles, 15 Feb 1969) He might have used strong words to discourage sense gratification in all its superfluous forms, but he recognized everyone as a part and parcel of Krishna, and therefore a fit candidate for devotional service.

Homosexuality and Impotence?

Some aspects of Srila Prabhupada's ideas and attitudes might be more difficult to reconcile with sastric guidelines or empirical observations. They appear the result of having received inaccurate information on certain specific

[52] https://www.galva108.org/single-post/2014/05/07/srila-prabhupada-and-the-gays

themes, such as the relation between homosexuality and impotence:

Prabhupāda: We don't say that, "Stop altogether." No. We say: "No illicit sex." We don't say: "No sex" . . .
Nitāi (reading from SB 1.2.10, purport): "Because the body is made of senses, which also require a certain amount of satisfaction, there are regulative directions for satisfaction of such senses. But the senses are not meant for unrestricted enjoyment" . . .
Prabhupāda: Just like sex indulgence. If you indulge in more than necessary, then you will be impotent. Nature will stop. You know impotency? That will be there. Impotency; this homosex is also another sign of impotency. They do not feel sex impulse to woman. They feel sex impulse in man. That means he is impotent. It is impotency . . .
Nitāi: "For example, marriage, or the combination of a man with a woman, is necessary for progeny, but it is not meant for sense enjoyment."
Prabhupāda: Now this progeny is bother. It is sense enjoyment, homosex. Progeny, they don't want. They're not interested. Only sense gratification. This is another sign of impotency. When, after enjoying so many women

they become impotent, then they artificially create another sex impulse in homosex. This is psychology.
(Arrival Address, Chicago, 3 July 1975)

Later that year Srila Prabhupada made the same point: "This homosex propaganda is another side of impotency. So that is natural. If you enjoy too much, then you become impotent." (Morning Walk, Vrindavana, 6 Sept 1975) Now, taking impotence in the medical sense - the consistent inability to sustain an erection sufficient for sexual intercourse (erectile disfunction) or the inability to achieve ejaculation, or both - Srila Prabhupada's definition appears unconventional: "They do not feel sex impulse to woman. They feel sex impulse in man. That means he is impotent." Studies do indicate that gay men report erectile disfunction more frequently than heterosexuals. Research in the UK found that 56% of gay or bi men experience erectile dysfunction, whereas only 46% of straight men do; but I couldn't find any reference to a *causal relation* between the two; that *because* of impotence heterosexual men turn into homosexuals. Sometimes, the opposite appears to be the case: a man in a relationship with a woman experiences erectile dysfunction *because* he is actually gay. Srila Prabhupada seems to say that a male

heterosexual, exhausted by excessive promiscuity, becomes gay; or perhaps he is saying that after disproportionate exposure to heterosexual pleasures a man would start to sexually experiment with homoeroticism as an alternative pleasure avenue ("When, after enjoying so many women they become impotent, then they artificially create another sex impulse in homosex. This is psychology"). But what that has to do with impotence? It sounds almost as if he is implying that all gays exclusively receive penetration, acting only in a sexually receptive role - what Wikipedia defines as "total bottom." Frankly, I am not exactly sure what clinical, psychological or physiological dynamic Srila Prabhupada is describing in the above quotes. And it doesn't help that his interlocutors didn't try to clarify his words. It might be worth to mention that, besides its clinical or psychological dimensions, *impotence* has a rich history of cultural interpretation. The *Journal of the History of Sexuality* includes an article by Kevin J. Mumford, *"Lost Manhood" Found: Male Sexual Impotence and Victorian Culture in the United States*, in which the author analyzes different attitudes towards impotence in various periods: "A survey of comparable texts indicates that both earlier in the preindustrial era and later in the twentieth century the

dominant conceptions of impotence substantially differed from the conception that prevailed in Victorian culture."[53] It would be interesting to find out if Srila Prabhupada's conception of impotence would fit any of those conceptions; but I leave that research to others. Another sentence from a quote above may be worth considering: "Homosex. Progeny, they don't want. They're not interested. Only sense gratification." (Arrival Address, Chicago, 3 July 1975) This can be taken as a broad generalization, as certainly some homosexuals (as well as some heterosexuals) are not inclined to have children. Notwithstanding, there are many gay and lesbian couples willing - or actually eager - to adopt children and to assume all parental responsibilities. They do want "progeny" and are keen to start a family.

Trans in a Transforming World

Another exchange seems to show that Srila Prabhupada hadn't been aware of sex-changing operations - which at that time were in their early development. It also shows how ill-informed devotees could be: one describes

[53] https://www.jstor.org/stable/3704372

transexuals as *transvestites* (which only refers to people who dress in clothes primarily associated with the opposite sex; nothing to do with surgical sex change). The dialogues with his disciples on these delicate themes often reveal how unequipped these young men were to provide Srila Prabhupada with reliable references:

Paramahaṁsa: They have another thing now . . . a man goes to the doctor and has an operation to change his sex from man to woman.

Prabhupāda: Sex. Yes.

Paramahaṁsa: Or from woman to man. That's called transvestites.

Prabhupāda: That is going on?

Paramahaṁsa: Yes.

Prabhupāda: Successful?

Paramahaṁsa: Yes, sometimes. Sometimes they have some difficulties, but they have had many successful operations . . .

Prabhupāda: They are doing?

Paramahaṁsa: Well, they're changing, but they can't become pregnant. That's the only thing. They take these

special hormones, and then they can grow breasts and everything, just like a woman.

(Morning Walk, Perth, 13 May 1975)

Srila Prabhupada was working in a fast-changing world. The second part of the twentieth century saw an explosion of transformation in the realm of sexuality - culturally, medically and legislatively. From outlook to technology, everything was becoming radically different from the days of Srila Prabhupada's childhood and youth in India. Young and inexperienced, his disciples appeared to be also wrestling with the rapidly changing environment, struggling to give a "Vedic" interpretation to the bewildering display of innovation of their time.

His Disciples: Often Not Too Helpful in Presenting Balanced Views

Srila Prabhupada was surrounded by disciples who often lacked detailed knowledge of the subjects they were commenting on (in colloquial terms: they didn't always

know what they were talking about). Nonetheless, with the zeal typical of new converts and the enthusiasm of being in Srila Prabhupada's company, in those conversations they appear to strive to show themselves as radical and unbending as possible. Perhaps they were trying to impress Srila Prabhupada with their aggressive rejection of anything "material" and "materialistic."

In one of such exchanges, for instance, the devotees were telling Srila Prabhupada about a gay disciple who had left the practice of *bhakti-yoga*:

Prabhupāda: Yes. Some of our men, at least one, left our association . . .

Devotee: Yes, I spoke with him in San Francisco . . . he said . . . "I had to leave, because there was no place for me and my boyfriend." Even he was not attracted to having a girl, but he had a boy.

[At one point a *sannyasi* addresses Srila Prabhupada:]

Sannyasi: You said in Geneva that . . . no one has died from giving up smoking or illicit sex. So it is not so hard to do.

(Conversation, Paris, 14 June 1974)

The young *sannyasi*, who had said that "it is not so hard" to give up "illicit sex," later stepped down from the renounced order and got married. I am not criticizing him for trying to "hunt the rhinoceros" and failing. I am simply pointing out that, on the wings of youthful enthusiasm, transcending sexual involvement might have appeared to him and others like him as an easy task. They might have thought that it wasn't a big deal for a young gay (or heterosexual) to just choose total sexual abstention. After 57 years of ISKCON's history, we know better. (Or at least we *should* know better.)

Homosexuality Among Animals?

Srila Prabhupada said: "The world is degrading to the lowest status, even less than animal. The animal also do not support homosex. They have never sex life between male to male." (Conversation with the GBC, Los Angeles, 25 May 1972) It turns out that animals do engage in homosexual behavior: "Various forms of this are found in every major geographic region and every major animal group . . . documented in over 450 species of animals." a comprehensive *Wikipedia* article explains, "In fact, apparent homosexual individuals are known from all of the

traditional domestic species, from sheep, cattle and horses to cats, dogs and budgerigars [parakeets]." I do not doubt for a second that in 1972, when he spoke the above words, Srila Prabhupada sincerely believed that animals don't engage in homosexuality. To some extent the subject had been taboo even among researchers, and therefore it's not surprising that Srila Prabhupada wasn't aware of such phenomenon: "Academic research into the ubiquity of same-sex sexual behavior was not carried out on a large scale," the same Wikipedia entry explains, "possibly due to observer bias caused by social attitudes to same-sex sexual behavior, innocent confusion, lack of interest, distaste, scientists fearing loss of their grants or even from a fear of 'being ridiculed by their colleagues.'"[54] In 1975 a disciple did bring the topic up; but Srila Prabhupada appeared unconvinced:

Bahulāśva: In California they have passed a law that homosexuality is legal. So the psychologists say that they see the dogs and the hogs and monkeys having homosex relationships, so on that grounds, they say, it should be legal.

[54] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Homosexual_behavior_in_animals

Prabhupāda: They have got homosex? Dogs, hogs, I don't think.
(Morning Walk, San Francisco, 16 July 1975)

Studies in this field remain open to various, conflicting interpretations: "The observation of homosexual behavior in animals," the *Wikipedia* article continues, "can be seen as both an argument for and against the acceptance of homosexuality in humans, and has been used especially against the claim that it is a *peccatum contra naturam* ('sin against nature'). For instance, homosexuality in animals was cited by the *American Psychiatric Association* and other groups in their *amici curiae* brief to the United States Supreme Court in *Lawrence v. Texas*, which ultimately struck down the sodomy laws of 14 states." We will never know if information about homosexual behavior among animals would have influenced Srila Prabhupada's attitude about homosexuality among humans. Srila Prabhupada saying that animals "do not support homosex" appears to corroborate the principle that his words should be taken as completely authoritative when based on *sastra*, but not necessarily in areas not directly illuminated by scriptural revelation. Srila Prabhupada views on non-sastric topics (or in fields for which he didn't not possess a specialized

expertise) could presumably have been affected by his cultural background and by the data, possibly inaccurate or incomplete, available to him. Vaisnava etiquette may make us abhor thinking that "Srila Prabhupada was wrong," but in some instances he might not have received reliable information on certain mundane subjects.

"Male giraffes" Wikipedia *explains, "have been observed to engage in remarkably high frequencies of homosexual behavior . . . Such interactions between males have been found to be more frequent than heterosexual coupling. In one study, up to 94% of observed mounting incidents took place between two males."*

"Under no circumstances should the guru be disrespected," Srila Prabhupada explains; and then he adds: "As stated in the *śāstras*, when one disrespects a respectable superior, one loses his longevity and the results of his pious activities, and in this way one is degraded."

(SB 6.7.21-22, purport) I certainly do not wish to disrespect Srila Prabhupada in any way, shape or form (and I do not wish to lose my longevity or whatever meager pious credit I might have incidentally accrued). I am eternally grateful to him for translating the essential Vaisnava texts; for establishing Gaudiya-vaisnavism in the West (and for revitalizing it in India); for boldly challenging the materialistic paradigms in connection to the origins of the universe and of the human species; for reforming the debased eating habits of thousands (including myself); for introducing powerful festivals - such as Ratha-yatra - all over the world; for establishing a worldwide devotional community in which we can take shelter; for being kind and patient with his faltering followers (such as myself). I could go on describing his glories, his unique position in the broad divine strategy of re-spiritualization of the planet. I consider him a divinely empowered personality who played a prominent, unmatched role in Lord Caitanya's mission and extended pastimes.

I am personally obliged to him for coming to Italy in 1974, when I was 11 years old. He walked at the Colosseum, in Rome, next to the park in which I would play as a child. I

calculated that, although I never met him in person, I have been within less than one kilometer from him. I worship Srila Prabhupada. At the same time, I do not wish to subscribe to or promote a naive, mythological or Mayavadi view of an "omniscient Prabhupada" - an idolized, God-like being who knew everything about spiritual and material realities. That would be an historical and theological blunder; a conception that would annoy and displease him.

Srila Prabhupada in Rome, in the vicinity of the childhood home of the author.

Sexual Orientation ≠ Sexual Activity

No discussion on homosexuality would be fair without making a sharp distinction between homosexual *orientation* and homosexual *intercourse*. Sexual orientation is not a choice. Heterosexuals don't *choose* to be sexually and/or romantically attracted to members of the opposite gender. Homosexuals don't *choose* to be sexually and/or romantically attracted to members of the same gender. *Wikipedia* admits: "Scientists do not know the exact cause of sexual orientation . . . Although no single theory on the cause of sexual orientation has yet gained widespread support, scientists favor biologically-based theories. There is considerably more evidence supporting nonsocial, biological causes of sexual orientation than social ones, especially for males . . . Across cultures, most people are heterosexual, with a minority of people having a homosexual or bisexual orientation. A person's sexual orientation can be anywhere on a continuum, from exclusive attraction to the opposite sex to exclusive attraction to the same sex."[55]

[55] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sexual_orientation

By itself, sexual orientation - homosexual, heterosexual or whatever - doesn't make anyone sinful; it's a tendency; an acquired inclination. If there is no conscious decision or deliberate action, there is no immorality. The *Cambridge Dictionary* defines immorality as: "behaviour that is morally wrong, or outside society's standards of what is acceptable." Possessing a particular sexual orientation is not a *behavior*. Until acted upon, any proclivity or inclination doesn't make the person guilty. Just like those predisposed to aggressivity and violence: until they *act* on those drives, no court on earth would prosecute or condemn them. Srila Prabhupada offers a relevant angle "Our standard of morality and immorality is to see whether Kṛṣṇa is satisfied." (Lecture on Bg 2.26-27, London, 29 Aug 1973) Efforts to satisfy Krishna (and therefore to act morally) are accessible for devotees of any sexual orientation.

"But sin must be involved," a disagreeing Vaisnava may claim, "because otherwise the person would not have been born as gay."

"Some sin in previous lives is *always* involved," I would reply, "because if we were free from sinful, materialistic

desires we would not have been born at all (unless you are an *avatara* or something)." Srila Prabhupada explains: "without being sinful, nobody accepts this material body . . . It doesn't matter what kind of body a living entity has got, but the body itself is the symptom, is the sign that one is sinful. This is the conclusion of the *śāstra*. Because as soon as one is free from sinful activities, at that time he goes back to home, back to Godhead." (Lecture on NOD, Vrindavana, 5 Nov 1972) Asserting that those born with homosexual orientation *must* have been more sinful than heterosexuals would be indefensible. There is always a mixture of karmic reactions, and sexual orientation is only one of the many elements of the equation. Some gays are certainly fundamentally pious - and in fact they readily accept Krishna consciousness (while millions of heterosexuals do not). Also, it would be irrational to imagine that all gays have the same or similar karma. Being born gay in a place where gays are legally persecuted and psychologically tortured - what to speak of being hanged or forcibly castrated - can represent a sign of some significant karmic burden that that soul needs to process. But in other environments being gay doesn't preclude material prosperity and success. For instance, in 2009 Icelander Johanna Sigurdardottir became the first openly

Johanna Sigurdardottir

gay head of government. At one point Forbes magazine listed her among the one hundred most powerful women in the world. Being homosexual didn't prevent her from achieving influence and prominence. In any case, there is a lot of mixture in everyone's karma. One may be born ugly but rich; someone else handsome but poor. After all, millions and billions of heterosexuals live miserable lives, suffering from a plethora of karmic consequences. Our sexual orientation is only one of the many aspects of our embodied condition. But let's try to understand better the meaning of *sexual orientation*. According to the *American Psychological Association* (APA): "Sexual orientation refers to an enduring pattern of emotional, romantic and/or sexual attractions to men, women or both sexes." [56] This definition is important because when talking about homosexuality we are not merely talking about a longing for physical union. The APA pamphlet continues: "Sexual orientation is commonly discussed as if it were solely a characteristic of an individual, like biological sex, gender

[56] https://www.apa.org/topics/lgbtq/orientation

identity or age. This perspective is incomplete because sexual orientation is defined in terms of relationships with others. People express their sexual orientation through behaviors with others, including such simple actions as holding hands or kissing. Thus, sexual orientation is closely tied to the intimate personal relationships that meet deeply felt needs for love, attachment and intimacy. In addition to sexual behaviors, these bonds include nonsexual physical affection between partners, shared goals and values, mutual support, and ongoing commitment." Sexual orientation therefore determines the direction in which the individual may or will look in life for romantic companionship, connubial connection and emotional support - not just sex. As such, as with any heterosexual relation, physical intimacy and erotism may often represent a very small (or nonexistent) part of the relation. This consideration is important, because, in my observation, often uninformed devotees characterize homosexuality in a narrow and superficial sense, exclusively or primarily as a style of copulation and erotic recreation. This is a gross, biased, unscientific, and unfair pigeonholing. The educated reader you might be already familiar with these themes and may find my elaboration - especially the extended references - as unnecessary or even

patronizing. But I can assure you, from my direct experience, that in this area there abound in ISKCON an abysmal lack of information and appalling levels of prejudice. Once, for instance, within a leadership course, as part of a lesson on how to have respectful, productive dialogue, I assigned the topic of homosexuality (as a potentially divisive topic) to one of the groups. At the end of the exercise the group reported their conclusion: gay devotees should undergo treatment and be cured. Somehow in that group - and these were devotees attending a course meant to prepare them for major leadership responsibilities - nobody was aware of the simple fact: *homosexual orientation cannot be "cured" because it's not an illness.*

"But," an opponent may argue, "as you said before, not everyone agrees; some medical professionals still consider homosexuality as a mental or physical disorder." "Yes," I would reply, "but if, for argument's sake, we accept that homosexuality is some sort of disease, where is the issue of morality or immorality? An illness is an illness, not a moral choice." Plus, there is no reliable evidence that orientation can be changed.

Can Sexual Orientation Be Changed?

"No!" our opponent may retort, "You say that if it's a clinical condition there is no immorality. But homosexuality *causes* immoral behavior. Therefore, one who suffers from it has the *moral duty* to get treatment, to get cured."

In that case I would say: "First of all, we have already discussed that the idea that homosexuality is an illness is largely considered obsolete in modern medical circles." For instance, the *Indian Psychiatric Society* (IPS) has said that it is "time to stop looking at homosexuality as a mental illness," adding that there is no scientific evidence that sexual orientation can be altered by any treatment. The Society issued a position statement saying that, "Homosexuality is not a psychiatric disorder and we recognise same sex sexuality as a normal variant of human sexuality much like heterosexuality and bisexuality."[57] But if we somehow insist on seeing homosexuality as a

[57] https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/homosexuality-not-an-illness-indian-psychiatric-society/article61515009.ece

disorder - especially one that can be *cured* - let's recognize that it is at least from the nineteen century that they have been trying to *cure* homosexuals and turn them into heterosexuals, but often those attempts simply created harm. They have tried in so many ways: surgical treatments such as hysterectomy, ovariectomy, clitoridectomy, castration, vasectomy, pudic nerve surgery and lobotomy. They tried substance-based methods including hormone treatment, pharmacologic shock treatment, nausea-inducing drugs, sexual stimulants, or sexual depressants. They also tried reducing aversion to heterosexuality, syntonic therapy, electroshock, group therapy, bioenergetics, hypnosis, self-hypnosis, and psychoanalysis. *Wikipedia* reports that "Homosexual prisoners were a preferred target of Nazi human experimentation . . . The best-known experiments involving homosexual men were attempts by endocrinologist Carl Vaernet to change prisoners' sexual orientations by implanting a pellet that released testosterone. Most of the victims, non-consenting prisoners at Buchenwald, died shortly thereafter." The article concludes that "clinical observations and self-reports indicate that many individuals who unsuccessfully attempt to change their sexual orientation experience considerable psychological distress. For these reasons, no

major mental health professional organization has sanctioned efforts to change sexual orientation and virtually all of them have adopted policy statements cautioning the profession and the public about treatments that purport to change sexual orientation."[58]

"But... wait a minute!" Exclaims our antagonist, "You just quoted Wikipedia, which mentioned 'unsuccessful attempts'; which means that there must also have been successful attempts to change one's orientation. What about them?"

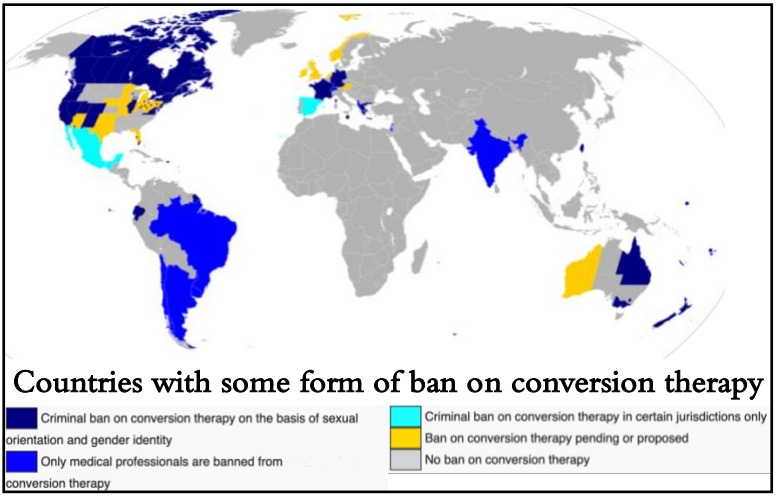
In a sense, the challenger is right. But only in a limited and possibly misleading sense, "Yes, there are a number of people and organizations that *claim* success in changing people's sexual orientation, but the data is shaky at best; and often what changes is just self-perception." Gays undergoing some gruesome attempt at reprogramming may build a new image of themselves and start *believing* that they are heterosexual now. They may even start *behaving* like heterosexuals - but the change may be neither deep, nor real, nor lasting - and, most importantly, who said that the ordeal was needed in the first place? Let

[58] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Conversion_therapy

me quote from the website of the *American Psychological Association*: "APA is concerned about ongoing efforts to mischaracterize homosexuality and promote the notion that sexual orientation can be changed and about the resurgence of sexual orientation change efforts (SOCE) . . . Some individuals and groups have promoted the idea of homosexuality as symptomatic of developmental defects or spiritual and moral failings and have argued that SOCE, including psychotherapy and religious efforts, could alter homosexual feelings and behaviors . . . Many of these individuals and groups appeared to be embedded within the larger context of conservative religious political movements that have supported the stigmatization of homosexuality on political or religious grounds . . . In response to these concerns, APA appointed the Task Force on Appropriate Therapeutic Responses to Sexual Orientation to review the available research on SOCE and to provide recommendations to the Association . . . Recent studies of participants in SOCE identify a population of individuals who experience serious distress related to same sex sexual attractions. Most of these participants are Caucasian males who report that their religion is extremely important to them . . . There are no studies of adequate scientific rigor to conclude whether or not recent SOCE

do or do not work to change a person's sexual orientation. Scientifically rigorous older work in this area . . . found that sexual orientation . . . was unlikely to change due to efforts designed for this purpose . . . Although sound data on the safety of SOCE are extremely limited, some individuals reported being harmed by SOCE. Distress and depression were exacerbated. Belief in the hope of sexual orientation change followed by the failure of the treatment was identified as a significant cause of distress and negative self-image . . . Although there is insufficient evidence to support the use of psychological interventions to change sexual orientation, some individuals modified their sexual orientation identity (i.e., group membership and affiliation), behavior, and values . . . They did so in a variety of ways and with varied and unpredictable outcomes, some of which were temporary . . . " In other words, some people do come to change *the way they see themselves* but with "varied and unpredictable outcomes, some of which were temporary." Some, after all the tribulations, went back to where they started. The somewhat technical and formal language tends to shroud the deadly impact of the so-called conversion therapy: "Rates of suicide among LGBTQ youth are already high, due to feelings of isolation or 'otherness,' societal stigma,

harassment, and threats of violence. In fact, they are four times as likely as their peers to have suicidal thoughts, to make a plan for suicide, and to attempt suicide. However . . . youth who reported undergoing conversion therapy were more than twice as likely to report having attempted suicide as their LGBTQ peers who did not experience change efforts."[59]


Countries with some form of ban on conversion therapy
Criminal ban on conversion therapy on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity
Only medical professionals are banned from conversion therapy
Criminal ban on conversion therapy in certain jurisdictions only
Ban on conversion therapy pending or proposed
No ban on conversion therapy

It's not by chance that conversion therapy for minors is getting banned in various countries. In 2020, for instance, Germany banned it for minors, but also started protecting

[59] https://www.newportacademy.com/resources/mental-health/conversion-therapy-pray-away/

adults undergoing it because of force, fraud or pressure. *Wikipedia* lists 25 films about conversion therapy.[60] I watched one (and I found it instructive): the 2018 movie *Boy Erased.* It's based on the true story of the son of Baptist parents who was forced to undergo conversion therapy.

The above quoted APA article continues: "the American Psychological Association concludes that there is insufficient evidence to support the use of psychological interventions to change sexual orientation . . . the American Psychological Association advises parents, guardians, young people, and their families to avoid sexual orientation change efforts that portray homosexuality as a mental illness or developmental disorder and to seek psychotherapy, social support and educational services that provide accurate information on sexual orientation and sexuality, increase family and school support, and reduce rejection of sexual minority youth."[61]

"But" our friend protests, "The neutrality of the studies quoted by the APA was questioned; therefore some consider that research controversial."

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[60] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Category:Films_about_conversion_therapy
[61] https://www.apa.org/about/policy/sexual-orientation

"True," I would have to agree, "It's a fact that so-called ex-gay organizations expressed concerns about the lack of representation of pro-reparative-therapy perspectives on the task force, while alleging that anti-reparative-therapy perspectives were amply represented." Obviously, on one side or the other of the debate people bring their predispositions to the table. People are influenced by their beliefs and existing mental models. Researchers are human beings, and are also affected by knowledge filters; but, just as researchers have their prior assumptions, also the 'patients' have their prejudices, and it seems that it's the influence of dogmatic cultural and religious conventions that push many people to try to change their orientation. A majority of people who attempt to change their sexual orientation or push their children to do so, come from conservative religious backgrounds. In other words, it's the pressure from their religious creeds and their religious leaders that push these people to *think* and *feel* that there is something wrong with being gay. They are made to feel ashamed, guilty and dirty. That's why they are willing to undergo gruesome, extensive and expensive so-called "treatments." Sometimes minors - adolescents - have been forced to attend these therapies *involuntarily*. In some cases, they were kept in isolation for months. Millions of

gays are perfectly fine with being gay and would never even dream to try to change their sexual orientation. For instance - and this is technical but crucial - in 1980 The *American Psychiatric Association* (APA) replaced "sexual orientation disturbance" with "ego-dystonic homosexuality." What does it mean? It means that they stopped considering homosexuality a clinical problem, but some homosexuals *think* it's a problem to be homosexual. It doesn't fit their ideal self-image. They experience conflict or dissonance between what they believe they should be and what they are. Six years later, in 1986, the APA deleted also "ego-dystonic homosexuality" from its diagnostic manual and now classifies "persistent and marked distress" about one's sexual orientation under *Sexual Disorders Not Otherwise Specified*.

"But these are all demons," our friend finally explodes, "we shouldn't listen to them at all! These are all theories and speculations. These people kill cows. They kill babies in the womb! The WHO, the *World Health Organization* recommends 'safe abortion' - safe for whom? Not for the baby, of course! It's like promoting 'safe murder'; it's an oxymoron. The WHO says on its official site: 'safe abortion protects women's and girls' health and human rights' - but

what about the 'human rights' of the unborn girls? (Or the unborn boys?) They say, 'Abortions are safe when they are carried out with a method that is recommended by WHO.' These people *recommend* killing babies; how can you take them seriously? Who cares what they believe? APA rhymes with *papa*, sin. They can list homosexuality as whatever they like; as a blessing in disguise, as a stroke of luck, as a gift from Santa Claus... but who cares? These people are demoniac, and devotees should never listen to them!"

OK, I am not exactly sure what killing cows in the slaughterhouse or killing babies in the womb have to do with homosexual orientation, which has nothing to do with eating habits and which does not provoke pregnancies. But I get it: if these organizations are morally defective and ignorant about the broader laws of nature, how can they be trusted to accurately define something as complex and controversial as homosexuality? Ultimately, we must choose our *pramanas*, our evidences, carefully. How can we depend for absolute knowledge on outfits like the APA, which changed their views on homosexuality so many times in the last several decades? Maybe their science is really improving through the accumulation of data; or perhaps their conclusions are being increasing

influenced by mounting cultural prejudice and rising demands for (constantly shifting) political correctness. At any rate, be as it may, our friend shows a lot of emotion. After a series of probing questions, challenging but reasonable, suddenly our friend rejected some of the references forming the fabric of our dialogue. There is no point in quoting from medical organizations anymore. Better to change angle completely. "OK, Prabhu." I would answer, "I agree that cows and unborn babies should not be killed - neither by heterosexuals, nor by homosexuals, nor by bisexuals. I also agree that organizations that changed their opinion so many times in the last fifty years do not constitute totally dependable sources of information. But I am curious: it seems that's the idea that homosexuality is a disease - a curable disease at that - is very important to you. Would you like to explain why?"

"Well..." he seems taken aback by my change in tack. He probably expected me to argue back, but instead I am asking him to introspect, to dig for deeper motivations. Finally he offers, "Well, Srila Prabhupada said that homosexual appetite is not for any sane male, that no sane man would feel homosexual attraction; therefore, it must be a sickness."

I now need to muster all my humility and tentativeness. "OK, Prabhu; thank you. But, if I may ask, what if Srila Prabhupada's views on this topic - which is, after all, a material subject - were somewhat influenced by the cultural attitudes and data he acquired from imperfect sources? What if his opinions were shaped by clinical ideas that medical professionals later legitimately discarded?"

Now he looks at me suspiciously. "Are you saying that Srila Prabhupada was wrong?"

"I wouldn't use that expression," I say, "but I remain open to the possibility that, perhaps, what he might have heard about homosexuality wasn't the most accurate information; as in the case of animals not engaging in same-gender sex. Or maybe he repeated opinions that were considered authoritative in his time; ideas that further research revealed as outdated. All I am saying is: are we 100% sure that the information Srila Prabhupada received on the subject was correct; perfectly accurate? Furthermore, as you mentioned 'sane male' I would add, Srila Prabhupada often didn't use words in their dictionary meaning." As far as madness, craziness, sanity and insanity, for instance, he said: "In this material world everyone is

mad, crazy. It is a difference of degrees only. I may be more crazy than yourself, but we are all crazies." (Lecture on CC, *Madhya* 20.294-298, New York, 20 Dec 1966) He also said: "Sanity means become devotee. That is sanity. And one who is not devotee is insane, insanity." (Lecture on Bg 2.27-38, Los Angeles, 11 Dec 1968) These statements may be suitable from a philosophical point of view, but we can't expect professional psychiatrists and psychological associations to take them literally, as technical, clinical expressions.

"One Should Not Uncover His Faults"

Lord Krishna says in the *Bhagavatam*:

ācāryaṁ māṁ vijānīyān
navamanyeta karhicit
na martya-buddhyāsūyeta
sarva-deva-mayo guruḥ

"One should know the *acarya* as Myself and never disrespect him in any way. One should not envy him, thinking him an ordinary man, for he is the representative

of all the demigods." (SB 11.17.27) Commenting on this verse, Vīrarāghava Ācārya of the Rāmānuja *sampradāya* says: "'One should not envy' means 'one should not uncover his faults'" (*nāsūyeta doṣān nāviṣkurvīta*). This shows that the bona fide *acarya* could, on some level, occasionally commit mistakes, but the disciple or follower should not search for or advertise such inaccuracies.

The discriminating reader may protest: "Hey, wait a minute! This is precisely what you are doing throughout this book; you are searching for mistakes in what Srila Prabhupada said - for instance about animals not engaging in homosexual acts - and you are announcing them to the world. You take passages from private, obscure, informal conversations and make them public!"

"Yes," I must admit, "that's exactly what I am doing. Guilty as charged. Perhaps I am simply envious and demoniac. Maybe I am only attempting to exorcize Srila Prabhupada's divine influence and dim the perception of his effulgence. But at least give me the chance to explain the rationale of my motivation, the logical reasons for such reporting." I will start by quoting the "Draft Statement on Hermeneutics Rev3" a 71-page document, written in 2014,

representing the fruit of the collaboration among "Hrdayananda Maharaja, Bhaktivikasa Maharaja, Badrinaryan Dasa, Drutakarma Dasa, and Radhikaramana Dasa," their face-to-face work facilitated by Vraja Vihari Das. The GBC had requested the committee to address twenty hermeneutical questions such as "What is the status of Prabhupada's statements which are not drawn from shastra?" or "What should be the attitude of Prabhupada's followers toward these statements?" The project was later given to the Sastric Advisory Council (SAC) and this 71-page document, written by Drutakarma Dasa, was left unpublished. It is not therefore an official ISKCON policy paper, but it certainly represents the result of deep deliberations by scholarly and/or senior Vaisnavas. Particularly relevant to this book is the question, submitted by the GBC: "Can there be mistakes in Srila Prabhupada's statements?" The committee reminds the reader that they did not themselves formulate the question; they were "responding to questions specifically put to this committee by the GBC . . . Normally, it would not be appropriate for a disciple or granddisciple to raise a question like this, using this specific word 'mistakes,' in connection with Srila Prabhupada. But questions like this do in fact arise in discussions of Srila Prabhupada's

statements in our Society. Let us preface our remarks by affirming that Srila Prabhupada never makes any mistakes in his overall presentation of fundamental spiritual truths. But there is a limited category of statements in which we can find examples of what are commonly known as 'mistakes' . . . the spiritual master is not omniscient like God, and therefore should not be expected to know everything perfectly . . . A faithful disciple accepts the statements of guru as true. Only if there is some clear and compelling reason should a disciple begin to consider the possibility that in some rare instance there might be some kind of error, and even in such cases the disciple maintains proper etiquette, as indicated by Viraraghava Acarya." I believe that a few of Srila Prabhupada statements on homosexuality involve "some kind of error." I also believe there is a "clear and compelling reason" to explore the issue, as the status of Srila Prabhupada as a bona fide spiritual leader, the reputation of his Society and even the faith of his followers may be at stake. The paper continues: "While a faithful devotee should not search out and advertise the guru's or the acarya's so-called errors, sometimes other people bring out such 'mistakes' and the devotee must reply intelligently, which may include admitting that within a certain limited range there may be

some few mistakes in Srila Prabhupada's statements, which do not affect the overall correctness of his presentation of Krishna consciousness." I don't see any viable, sound or legitimate alternative to recognizing that " within a certain limited range" some of Srila Prabhupada's statements were inaccurate.

A brahminical movement should be guided by the principle of honesty. We should be truthful. We should recognize when an affirmation is not factual. Trying to rationalize that everything Srila Prabhupada ever said is correct, ultimately represents a disservice to him and a distortion of our mission. It makes his followers look like hypocritical spin doctors or mindless, bigoted zealots. If we can't admit to facts, how can we expect the public to trust us? How could they take us seriously? "Intelligent people often look for a reasonable hermeneutic in a prospective religion." The paper states, "If we offer them one, they are often encouraged to go forward in their Krishna consciousness. Also, many intelligent devotees, even if they don't bring it up to us, do notice mistakes and this can cause them to doubt basic teachings that should not be doubted. Thus it is right and valuable that we are mentioning that minor mistakes may occur, because this

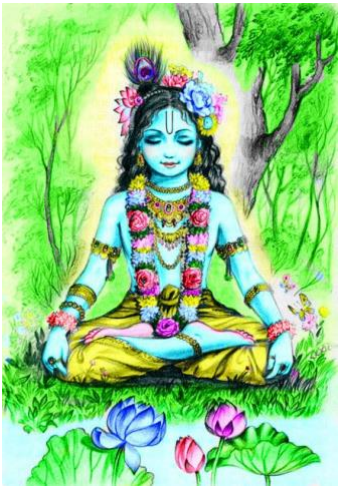
knowledge, for many devotees, serves as a safety valve, and preserves their faith in Srila Prabhupada's important teachings."

Discrimination, I suggest, is the key word in this connection. It's proper, I believe, to understand Srila Prabhupada as a divinely empowered messenger of the infallible Supreme Personality of Godhead, Lord Sri Krishna. At the same time, Srila Prabhupada wasn't omniscient; he didn't know everything about everything: "Srila Prabhupada did not make any mistakes in his presentation of the fundamental truths of Krishna consciousness." The paper continues, "If there are any mistakes, they are in other areas, such as . . . some details of material knowledge, Srila Prabhupada might make a 'mistake' in this sense: he might say something, based on information presented to him at a certain point in time, that he would not have said if he had better information." One example comes to mind: Srila Prabhupada arrives in New York; appreciating the arrangements for the upcoming Ratha-yatra, he praises the local GBC as the right person for the job. In private, devotees explain to Srila Prabhupada that another leader was actually organizing everything, while the local GBC was

experiencing serious spiritual challenges and was largely inactive and unavailable. So, an impression was changed when more accurate information was provided. "There are in fact examples of Prabhupada changing his mind on a matter of material knowledge when presented with what he himself accepted as better or more complete information." The paper gives the example of Srila Prabhupada changing his attitude towards a book called *The Aquarian Gospel* once he heard about its questionable authenticity. Another question the paper attempts to address is: "What role does Srila Prabhupada's historical context play in understanding his teachings?" The paper states, among other things, "His responses sometimes reflected and incorporated elements of the cultural milieu in which Krishna placed him. In other words, they reflected and incorporated elements of his experiences in a certain cultural and historical context . . . Srila Prabhupada's views were certainly not completely dictated by his cultural and historical context . . . So we accept that by Krishna's arrangement Prabhupada did respond to his historical context, and manifest influences from it, in different ways at different stages of his life." One wonders: what could be the intention behind "Krishna's arrangement" in allowing Srila Prabhupada to imbibe and

express inaccurate notions? This is a delicate theological issue.

What Was Krishna Thinking?



Who can fathom the mind of God? I seriously doubt I can clearly grasp His divine plans. At the same time Lord Krishna is a rational person; supremely rational, in fact. Being also omnipotent, He could have certainly prevented Srila Prabhupada from getting flawed impressions; from receiving invalid information; or from repeating inaccurate notions. Why Krishna didn't protect his pure devotee from making erroneous affirmations, some of which today and in the future may be even deemed embarrassing? One answer that I consider plausible is as follows: religious movements (and ISKCON is no exception) tend to mythologize their spiritual leaders, raising them to the status of god-like, flawless beings; infallible individuals divested from pesky human

frailties. Religious movements (and ISKCON is no exception) also have the habit of taking their founders as the final word in spiritual revelation; the highest manifestation of God's blessings to humanity; the ultimate and incomparable personification of divine benevolence and the unsurpassable apex in their traditions. The belief, stated or unstated, is that nobody in the future will ever be as good or as powerful as their founders. These tendencies appear as universal as they are childish and parochial. Humans, even scholarly and devoted, seem seduced by exceptionalism. They seem to crave the idea of belonging to the best denomination, the one established by the best representative of God. They seem to yearn for the belief that they are practicing the most complete and perfect form of devotion the world has ever seen or will ever see. These feelings, unsupported by scriptural evidence, come from a heady mixture of historical myopia, false ego, and sense of insecurity. Throw in a pinch of need for cognitive stability and a peppering of sectarianism, and the pious delusion becomes ready for institutional metabolization and perpetuation.

I am observing the same irrational penchant in ISKCON today. I am noticing the creed, spoken or unspoken, that

Srila Prabhupada is the pinnacle of the *sampradaya* and that nobody will ever come close to him. Of course, it's a fact that no one, in the annals of this age, could (again) be the first to bring the *Bhagavatam* to the Western shores or the first to start the International Society for Krishna Consciousness. That glory has been already assigned and, for the rest of this Kali-yuga, no one else can claim it. But isn't a bit early to declare that no greater or equivalent guru can ever appear? It is said that the movement will go on for ten thousand years. In the first five hundred, besides Lord Caitanya (who is the Absolute Truth Himself), this planet already received *acaryas* of the caliber of Srila Rupa Goswami, Srila Jiva Goswami, Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakura, Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura and Srila Prabhupada himself. On what basis should we insist that in the next 9,500 years only lesser personalities will appear? Is it scriptural? Is it logical? Are we to imagine that the inexhaustible Lord Krishna has depleted His reserve of great teachers? Should we think that no other *gopi*, of the many thousands eternally dancing with Krishna, would be willing to pay a visit to Earth? I am afraid that in the upcoming centuries Srila Prabhupada may be assessed by the general public, rightly or wrongly, as not fully equipped to deal with the complexities of race,

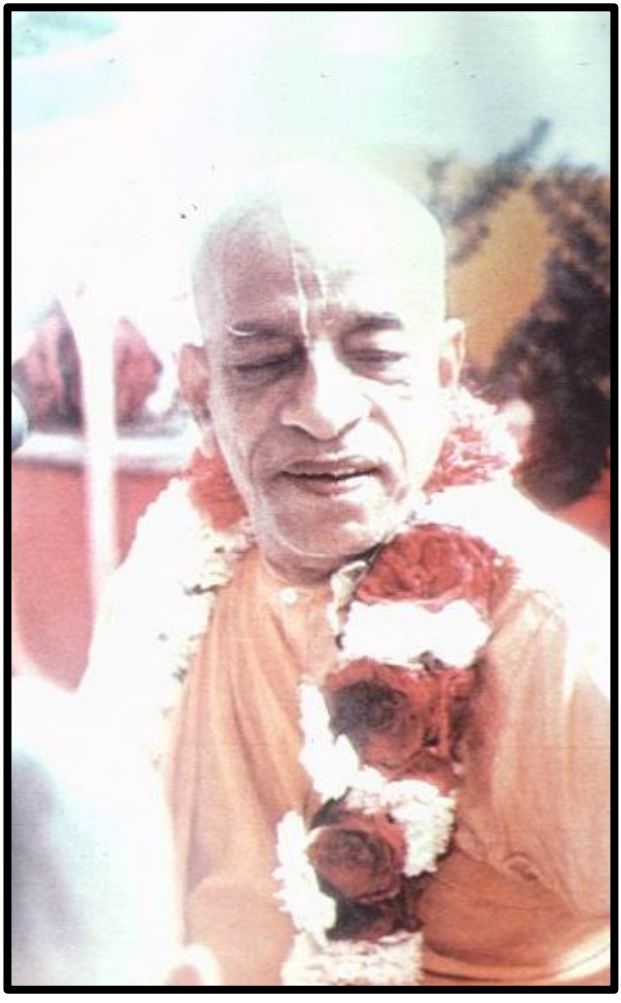
homosexuality or the role of women (and possibly with other fields as well). I hope he will be revered and loved for his spiritual gifts, his personal sacrifice, his outstanding accomplishments in spreading awareness of Krishna and in making texts such as the *Gita* and the *Bhagavatam* accessible worldwide, but I am afraid his destiny could be similar to, say, a George Washington, celebrated at one point as the father of the United States of America, but whose legacy remains tainted by his "owning" enslaved people. Both, I presume, may continue to be valued for their contributions - one in the spiritual sphere, the other in the military and political field - but a gnawing sense of their cultural inadequacy and obsolescence may permeate their memory. We can go the ostrich way; stick our heads in the sand and pretend not to hear the swelling of grievances; or we can start dealing with them - as individuals and as an organization. This book represents a flawed and incomplete attempt at addressing the issues. In the endless river of eternal time, Srila Prabhupada is, after all, an episode. A marvelous, glorious, dazzling chapter in the endless play of the Absolute within the temporary realm. One that, within the course of infinity, will ultimately be forgotten by humanity, leaving room for other displays of divine intervention. The question (which

I cannot answer) is: will a comparable individual figure manifest in the future, one which Gaudiya-vaisnavas - and particularly ISKCON devotees - can accept as foremost and identify as their prominent leader? Another question (which also I cannot answer) is: if that will happen, if that personality will manifest, when will it happen?

It's entirely possible that - as many devotees today envision - Srila Prabhupada will indeed remain as the *Yuga-acarya*, the prominent beacon for the next ten thousand years; the personality whose instructions will continue to constitute the mainframe of ISKCON through the millennia. I believe there is a good chance that Srila Prabhupada - his person and legacy - may remain as the glue that will hold ISKCON together for a (relatively) long time. A surmisable role of the various inaccuracies, generalizations and cringe-inducing statements Srila Prabhupada spoke on different subjects could be to provide his followers the nudge necessary to unclasp their minds from close-minded provincialisms, juvenile fantasies, and unexplored dogmas.

To fully embrace whatever great personality may come next, or to welcome needed modifications in policy and mentality, we ISKCON members would need to relinquish

whatever unrealistic idea we have been nurturing about the Founder-*Acarya*. No need to deny Srila Prabhupada's spiritual greatness and extraordinary achievements. Also, no need to attribute to him an imaginary infallibility. That, I believe, is the role of the little (mundane) defects in awareness and expression that Krishna allowed to creep within Srila Prabhupada's otherwise impeccable record. We need to ask ourselves: are we more attached to appreciate Srila Prabhupada as he truly is, or are we more attached to protect our present outlook?



4. Sexism in Srila Prabhupada's Teachings?

It's Not All Black-or-White

Racism is, in my mind, pretty clear cut: there is no such thing as different *races*, even if we colloquially use *race* to indicate physical differences such as skin color. There are smart people (and idiots) in every ethnic group. There are godly characters (and sinners) in every country. People of certain places tend to have common cultural leanings; but ultimately we need to deal with individuals, and who they are is not determined by their genetic ancestry or zip code.

Homosexuality is, in my mind, also quite simple: some humans possess that sexual orientation. They are not, as individuals, intrinsically better or worse than heterosexuals. The goal for everyone remains the same: developing pure love for God. The method is also

identical: devotional service. After all, sexuality represents only one aspect of our acquired psychophysical nature, and, to advance in spiritual life, we all need to learn to manage and regulate our sexual drives - of whatever orientation. For those not immediately able to fully transcend or renounce sex, matrimony provides a promising platform for discipline and companionship - and for experiencing parenthood - for people of any sexual orientation.

With sexism the issue becomes a bit more complex, because with sexism we deal with anatomical and physiological dissimilarities that impose, induce or enable some legitimate differentiations. To give a practical example: it's not by chance that the Olympic Games still segregate male and female athletes within separate competitions. Is that a *sexist* approach or is it simply the realistic acknowledgement of the corporeal distinctions between the genders? Answer: it's the second. Consider the United States Military Academy at West Point. On their first day, prospective male cadets must shave their heads; but girls can keep their hair. Is that a discriminatory standard against males, forced to renounce their locks? Or is this leniency towards females a sexist policy

discriminating against women, who are apparently considered less detached or more image-conscious? Or is it perhaps a reasonable rule that takes into account the typical predispositions of the genders?

The issue with sexism is to determine if and when irrational prejudice against a gender manifests within social, occupational, intellectual or religious interactions, causing unfair or abusive treatment. For instance, some cases of pay gap between men and women doing the same job may qualify as inequitable. For instance, in the U.S., according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, a woman gets only 82 cents for every dollar a man earns. And this after decades of efforts by pressure groups and after pay discrimination has been illegal for more than 50 years (other countries exhibit a much wider pay gap.) Some examples of unfairness and exploitation are obvious in human society, but there is no exact science or perfect formula to determine if a comment or a policy is sexist, or if it is simply a reasonable application of the objective differences between the genders. Something may *look* sexist - partial to one gender or the other - but it may just be a norm sincerely meant for everyone's good, even if counterintuitive by contemporary outlooks.

Sexism - Word or Warhead?

The word *sexism* was born loaded, conceived for weaponization. "Although its origin is unclear," Britannica.com explains, "the term *sexism* emerged from the 'second-wave' feminism of the 1960s through the '80s and was most likely modeled on the civil rights movement's term racism (prejudice or discrimination based on race)."[62]

Wikipedia offers more details, explaining that *sexism* was most likely coined in 1965 by Pauline M. Leet as an assonance and analogy of *racism*: "Both the racist and the sexist . . . are making decisions and coming to conclusions about someone's value by referring to factors which are in both cases irrelevant." The first time the term appeared in print was in 1968, from a speech by Caroline Bird: "Sexism is judging people by their sex when sex doesn't matter. Sexism is intended to rhyme with racism." Of course, defining when sex matters and "when sex doesn't matter" is a sensitive, debatable, and politically charged proposition. "Sexism may be defined as an ideology based

[62] https://www.britannica.com/topic/sexism

on the belief that one sex is superior to another."[63] says *Wikipedia*.

"But," the Hare Krishna reader might argue, "isn't a fact that the male human form - with due considerations for individual variations - presents potential advantages over the female body in the mission of self-realization? In other words, isn't the Vedic version a form of healthy, realistic *sexism*, based on revelations untouched by human frailties or transient political opinions?"

I would reply, "Yes, the psycho-physical set-up of women does present certain disadvantages on the path of spiritual perfection. Although, as we will see, transcendental triumphs are not precluded for women, the body of a man, in general, does present some advantage, as we will see in this section." Having said that, such broad considerations can be easily misunderstood and misapplied. Absorption in the (slight) superiority of the male form can easily turn into mindless machismo and pathological chauvinism when mixed with psychological maladjustments, childhood traumas, emotional deprivations, low IQ, youthful immaturity, or the desire to exorcise one's

[63] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sexism

attraction for women. It has been observed that the Vedic understanding of genders can easily degenerate (among not-so-Vedic men) into gratuitous misogynism and silly bias. Such mishandling of scriptural truths fits another aspect of the definition of sexism from the same *Wikipedia* article quoted above: "It is discrimination, prejudice, or stereotyping based on gender, and is most often expressed toward women and girls." So, objective evaluations of the difference of the genders is healthy and necessary; but "discrimination, prejudice, or stereotyping" are, by definition, unhealthy and abusive. Therefore, in talking about *sexism* - especially as an allegation against pure devotees of the Lord - we are threading a thin line; between a correct and incorrect understanding of the genders; between the *discriminating* and the *discriminatory*. We should also remember that gender is only one of the many factors that determine the situation of the embodied soul. To the devotee enquiring if a male form is "better" for spiritual life I would ask: would you rather be born as a female in a family of transcendentalists, growing up surrounded by the vibration of the holy names from your early childhood, being nourished by pure food while learning esoteric truths about God in a holy atmosphere, or would you rather be born as a male from

criminal, damaged, desperate and rudderless parents, in a home of drug-addicts, meat-eaters and atheists?

As a word, *sexism* was crafted for militancy, its fuzzy boundaries making it perfect for wide-ranging deployment. In warfare some bombings are more surgical, while others imprecise and messy. Similarly, the word *sexism* - a very ambiguous and blurred concept - can cause much collateral damage, maiming a lot of innocent bystanders. Like a nifty hand grenade, *sexism* can be easily flung at opponents to demonize or delegitimize them. It's often thrown around in broad sweeps, to indistinctly strike and snuff out any difference of opinion. Ironically, although it was originally designed as a tool for feminist activism, *sexism* has been repurposed to attack anti-men attitudes. As the *Britannica* article puts it: "As the term *sexism* gained vernacular popularity, its usage evolved to include men as victims of discrimination and social gender expectations. In a cultural backlash, the term *reverse sexism* emerged to refocus on men and boys . . . The appropriation of the term *sexism* was frustrating to many feminists, who stressed the systemic nature of women's oppression through structural and historical inequalities. Proponents of men's rights . . . warned against a

hypothesized approach of a female-dominated society. As the academic discipline of women's studies helped document women's oppression and resilience, the men's movement reasoned that it was time to document men's oppression." Although relevant, the issue of sexism against men and boys, I believe, is much less urgent and critical than sexism against women and girls. Whatever abuse women or society might have been inflicting on men, pales - both qualitatively and quantitatively - in front of the mistreatment and violence men have been perpetrating against women. Throughout history, women have been beaten, kidnapped, raped, killed, exploited, harassed, objectified, belittled, catcalled, maligned, insulted, stigmatized, harmed, depreciated, unfairly remunerated, unduly passed on for promotions, and victimized by men in thousands of other ways. The whole Vedic sociological model of gender interaction is based on protection of women. Protection from what? From whom? From men - obviously.

Sexism is "prejudice or discrimination based on sex." (Merriam Webster) Both words - *prejudice* and *discrimination* - warrant analysis. Prejudice is "a feeling of like or dislike for someone or something especially

when it is not reasonable or logical." (Merriam Webster) Did Srila Prabhupada *dislike* women? No. There is no evidence of it. He certainly had some ideas about their social role (ideas that collide head-on with some of the modern theories), but there isn't any indication that he disliked women, as a psychological inclination. Srila Prabhupada's conception of women's position and functions was consistent with the socio-theological framework of the Vedic revelation; "reasonable" and "logical" within the Vedic and Vaisnava context (in other words, aligned and consistent with Reality). Discrimination - another essential ingredient of sexism - is defined as "the practice of unfairly treating a person or group of people differently from other people or groups of people." (Merriam-Webster) Did Srila Prabhupada treat women *unfairly*? As a class, he treated them more than fairly. He even suffered criticism for doing his best to give them shelter, for his liberality: "These rascals keep these women unmarried to enjoy daily new, new young women, these *karmīs*, these rascals. There is club. There is club. These young women are paid for that topless, bottomless . . . They make pregnant and they go away. And this poor girl, either she has to kill the child or beg from the government, 'Give me welfare; otherwise...' Is

that freedom? . . . the woman wants equal right. Equal rights they enjoy, and the woman becomes pregnant, and he goes away, the boy. And she has to kill the child or beg from the government. This is her freedom . . . Rather we are giving freedom, that 'Never mind you have got illegitimate son. Come here. Live with us. Chant Hare Kṛṣṇa' . . . And they are happy. My Godbrothers criticize that 'You keep women in the temple.' I tell them, 'I cannot reject.'" (Morning Walk, Bombay, 9 Jan 1977)

His mental model of women might have been marginally affected by inaccurate information he received in his youth (such as the maximum size of male and female brains), but his approach was unswervingly compassionate and inclusive. On a personal level, Srila Prabhupada treated

women caringly, lovingly, and gentlemanly, as testified by his recorded communications - such as correspondence - and the testimony of women who directly interacted with him. Although his theoretical framework of women as a class certainly clashes with some of the contemporary beliefs, his approach was always centered on great respect: "Cāṇakya Paṇḍita says, *mātṛvat para-dāreṣu*, 'Any woman who is not your wife, she should be treated as your mother' . . . 'Mother,' that is Vedic culture. Because mother is always respected." (Lecture on SB 1.8.24, Mayapur, 4 Oct 1974) Some modern women might feel uncomfortable to be primarily addressed as *mothers* - as if their reproductive function was their defining characteristic - but the spirit, the intention of the custom is to offer reverence and deference; to train men not to see women as objects of sexual gratification. Men must see women as *something*. Unless men acclimatize themselves to routinely see women as honorable, esteemed motherly fugures, the default setting could easily become seeing them as object of sexual gratification. Not good. Language shapes culture and affects the psyche. *Mother* creates a "mental generational gap," a first psychological barrier to promiscuity. The expression has a civilizing, sobering effect.

"But" someone may ask, "what about seeing women as sisters?"

Srila Prabhupada didn't like the idea: "At the present moment, they have invented the word *bahinajī*, 'sister.' No. In the Vedic culture, there is no such thing as 'sister.' 'Mother,' that is Vedic culture." (Lecture on SB 1.8.24, Mayapur, 4 Oct 1974) Another crucial aspect of his approach to womanhood in general was the stress he gave on protecting women. Writing to one of his leaders about the girls in ISKCON, Srila Prabhupada emphasized: "The policy should be that all the women are given the utmost protection." (Letter to Rupanuga, 14 Feb 1973) Talking in general, Srila Prabhupada said, "By nature, they are weak. So they require protection. And until she reaches youthhood, she is protected by the father. As soon as she reaches youthhood, she is given to a young man, her husband, to give protection. And in old age she is protected by the elderly sons. This is the Vedic culture . . . In the Western countries, the women are given freedom like man, but that is unnatural. Unnatural. Therefore these poor souls are being exploited by the other section. It is a great deficiency of the Western sociology . . . They should not be ill-treated." (Lecture on SB 1.15.20, Los Angeles, 30

Nov 1973) So, Srila Prabhupada's mood was one of concern for the safety and shelter of women, like a kind and considerate father or grandfather. Ultimately, his focus was to facilitate everyone's self-realization, the platform of true equality: "Unless elevated to spiritual consciousness, everyone is conditioned and fallen . . . On the spiritual platform, however, when one is elevated to the platform of Kṛṣṇa consciousness, whether one is a man, woman, *śūdra* or whatever, everyone is equal." (SB 9.14.36, purport)

Legal Minimum Age for Marriage - Discrimination or Judiciousness?

As an example of something that could be taken either as sexism against women, or as sexism against men, or as an honest attempt to benefit all concerned, in India, the 2006 *Prohibition of Child Marriage Act*, fixed the minimum legal age for marriage at 18 for women and at 21 for men. Should we take it as sexist bias against males, forced to wait 1095 more days before they can legally marry? Or should we take it as a sexist discrimination against women, who are (statistically speaking) forced to marry older men?

Or should we take it as a sincere attempt at a rational, judicious decision by the legislators, who considered the differences in the developmental pace of the genders, the prevailing socio-economic and educational conditions, and the dominating cultural propensities within the country's various religious and ethnic groups? Who can say for sure if the law was sexist or if it was the best feasible outcome, one based on a mature and benign reading of the circumstances? In the early 1960s Srila Prabhupada, before leaving India, wrote in the *Bhagavatam*: "There must be compulsory marriage of young boys and girls attaining 24 years of age and 16 years of age respectively." (SB 1.17.38, purport) Let's analyze: in India, between 1949 and 1978, the minimum age for marriage for a girl was 15; at the time of its writing, Srila Prabhupada's idea was therefore legal (at least in India). I believe the expression "compulsory" wasn't intended in a legal sense (how can you *coerce* someone to marry by a certain age? And what about renunciants, who do not wish to tie the knot?). It appears as a strong cultural recommendation, but not as an actual suggestion for compulsory implementation. Again, the passage may attract sexist allegations from either side; "Why girls should be forced to marry, on average, men 8 years older than them?" "Why should men

be forced to wait 8 more years?" And so on. I have no doubt that Srila Prabhupada's intention was benevolent, meant for the good of all boys and girls; his recommendation designed to promote social sanctity and stability. Nonetheless, I strongly doubt that he would have written the same words after reaching the Western shores and observing the (low) level of responsibility and maturity of the American and European youths, who lacked the support of extended families and whose minds were often sidetracked by sex, drugs and rock and roll. I don't believe Srila Prabhupada would write the same advice today, some 60 years later; but if, for argument's sake, he was to propose the same policy nowadays (mandatory marriage for all girls at 16 and all boys at 24), scores of his followers would probably respectfully but vigorously plead with him to modify the text, due to legal concerns and other considerations. But the sentence remains in the books; and the well-intentioned recommendation - based on sound but circumstantial socio-cultural considerations - might be probably uncharitably branded today as a form of opinionated, retrograde sexism. (By the way, remarkably, Srila Prabhupada didn't envision marriage as the end of the girls' education; he adds in the same purport: "There is no

harm of co-education in the schools and colleges provided the boys and the girls are duly married.") What's embarrassing is witnessing how some puerile followers take every word of this or other purports as sacrosanct and immutable. "Srila Prabhupada said it and therefore must be true for the next 10,000 years! He was a pure devotee and therefore he knew past, present and future. All girls should marry at 16 and all boys should marry at 24! We may not understand why he wrote what he wrote, but we should energetically promote this policy, at all times and in all places, inside and outside of ISKCON!" A fanatical attitude that, in the contemporary context, represents a recipe for disaster - on various levels.

Who is the Man? Who is the Woman?

Let's take a short theological time-out. All souls, are, ontologically, *prakriti*, feminine entities yearning for the union with the original *purusa*; with the original male, the primordial *puruṣa*, Sri Krishna. Male and female embodiments are temporary identities; like actors in costumes, performing on stage. We try to imitate the real

enjoyer, God, and we end up in temporary male and female bodies: "Here we have taken the post, position, of *puruṣa* falsely. We are trying to exploit the material nature . . . The Supreme Lord is the husband, or the *puruṣa*. Husband means *puruṣa*, and *prakṛti* means *strī*. *Strī* means woman. Male, female, these two things. The supreme male is Kṛṣṇa, and everyone, either this dull matter or the living entities, they are called female, *prakṛti*. *Prakṛti* means female, and *puruṣa* means male. So nobody is actually male except Kṛṣṇa. We are also female. We are dressed like male, and somebody has dressed like female, but all of us, we are female, *prakṛti*, enjoyable. The enjoyer is Kṛṣṇa . . . In the material world we are trying to exploit one another either in the dress of male or in the dress of female—because this body is dress. So originally we are all female, but falsely we are trying to enjoy one another or this material world." (Lecture on Bg 13.1-2, Miami, 25 Feb 1975)

Since in this world we are dealing with embodied entities, we will focus on these categories of male and female, which generally present remarkable differences (besides the obvious, anatomical ones). As if life experience wasn't enough (some people perceive the world through thick

demagogical filters), studies in neurology, sociology, psychology and history clearly confirm that men and women tend to be different. Of course, we are dealing with percentages, not absolute numbers; therefore, *most women* tend to differ from *most men* in certain fundamental ways, but there are minority percentages of men and women who do not fit these majority classifications. The difficulty arises if we clumsily, arbitrarily turn majority proportions into absolute, universal figures and then try to force, bully, and intimidate the minorities - men or women - into abiding by the majority parameters. Here we share general observations, although individuals here and there might not fully fit these descriptions. Women are about relationships and experience; the woman wants the man to interact with her. She is more relationship-oriented than him. He is often happy just dealing with matter, moving things around or simply accomplishing some tasks. But the woman wants things done to generate an experience. Men like to get things done; women like to experience. If a machine can do the work, a man is happy. But the machine is appreciated by the woman if the machine generates a certain experience. The man drives to get to a destination; the woman wants to enjoy the ride; she wants

to savor the time with her husband. Women are looking for an experience, both in the process and in the result. Men want results and will put up with anything to get them. A man has a friend; that friend gives him a useful gift, say a watch; the man uses the watch; if their relationship breaks down chances are that the man will keep the watch and will continue to use it. If a woman gets a watch from a friend and then the relationship breaks down, it's likely that the woman will not use that watch anymore. Even mundane items are linked to experiences for a woman; the things in themselves are not important to her; it's the experience they get out of them that's crucial. More things, more experiences (which explains the tendency to accumulate stuff). Srila Prabhupada explains: "A woman is generally fond of household prosperity, ornaments, furniture and dresses. She is satisfied when the husband supplies all these things sufficiently." (SB 3.31.41, purport) Women are about aesthetics. If the curtains look good, it makes the woman feel good. But the man may just focus on hanging the curtains. Women crave situations which give rise to the emotions they want to taste; and wish that these situations should be provided by men. Situations are the external instruments for producing the emotions. Another aspect is

how men and women think. For men, intellectual, emotional, and sensual activities can be completely separate, disconnected activities. But for women it's one entity, one unit with different aspects. While the woman's emotions are functioning, her intelligence is also working, and the emotions may be expressed through the senses. Even when she is engaged in extremely intellectual activities, it's still the experience of that that is important. A lady can deal with, say, nuclear physics or microbiology if she likes it, if she has a positive experience. But the man tends to deal with it whether he likes it or not, because it's an intellectual activity; and his emotions don't actually figure in the equation. When men become emotional, they generally become pretty stupid; they disconnect from rationality. When they get really sensual, they are not very emotional. In the emotional and sensual aspects men generally don't use their brain, but women use their brains all the time. For the man, situations are either intellectual, or emotional, or sensual – in a divided and disjointed way. But during the emotional and sensual experiences the women are still using their intelligence, so if the man doesn't use his, she can't relate. That's why the macho male is the embodiment of idiocy. He is tough, he thinks he is cool, he is out to engage his senses... but there is zero

intelligence being applied, and therefore women find that repulsive. And men find it so hard to understand this.

Vedic literature teaches us what is male, what is female, what are their needs, what is their inter-relationship, etc. It's a Vedic concept that the wife should follow the husband; but *following* implies that the person being *followed* is moving forward. The husband can only expect the wife to follow him if he is actively going somewhere. Ultimately the nature of the self is feminine, but the soul in the male body is expected to manifest some degree of healthy masculine qualities. Many marriages fail because the man is ignorant of the nature of the relation. He just likes to think that he is the boss, but he doesn't understand that he is trying to be the boss in a female-like way. Real men, mature men, are gentle, sensitive, and accommodating. Androcentric, misogynistic men often simply display traits usually associated with feminine behavior. They are like skittish females with male genitalia. It's hard for women to get along with them because it's like two women vying for control. The truly "male man" wishes his wife to be the best she can. He is supportive and encouraging (not repressive due to his lack of confidence). Vaisnava real men, for instance, aren't uncomfortable and

disoriented in, say, seeing ladies excel in learning and teaching the philosophy. The secure husband rejoices seeing his wife assimilating the scriptures and presenting them effectively. Feeling personally minimized is a symptom of insecurity and unmanliness. In a letter, Srila Prabhupada expresses his desire to see both "boys and girls" become experts in studying and spreading Krishna consciousness: "siddhantic conclusions are being mentioned in all my books, and the boys and girls in our Krsna Society should now give more attention for studying the books very attentively . . . I hope in Washington center you will ask all the boys and girls to follow this method, because henceforward we will have to face many scholars and philosophers to stabilize our Krsna Consciousness movement." (Letter to Krsna Devi, 17 Feb 1970) Married men acting as women is a huge destabilizing force in society. Many men are male only in the strictly physiological sense - but psychologically they are women. Because such men act as women, the women will have to act as men. The life of the couple works according to a *dynamic equilibrium*: With a full male you will have a full female. With a partial male you will have a partial female. If the man is, say, forty percent female, the woman will have to be forty percent male. The missing maleness in the

man will be equalized by the woman, and vice versa. Vedic *jyotiṣa*, karmic trajectory analysis, illuminates these dynamics.

A Vision of Harmony and Collaboration

Let's look at how Srila Prabhupada saw the world and the ideal interaction of the genders in it. His vision, grounded on timeless Vedic teachings, will be hard to reconcile with current attitudes; I only request the reader to keep an open mind to the possibility that Srila Prabhupada's vision, if fulfilled, would be to everyone's benefit. It's a different conception of human life, its goal, and the methods to reach it. Unless one patiently assimilates the whole socio-theological construct, the ideas may result unintelligible, indigestible, and even inflaming. Srila Prabhupada envisioned the men as the providers, interacting with the world to secure the family's economy - as farmers, traders, artisans, administrators, teachers and so on - while the women's sphere of activities and control would be mostly within the domestic realm: taking care of children, cooking, managing the house, administering the home

finances, etc. "Let the man and woman combine together, live peacefully." Srila Prabhupada said, "The woman takes charge of the household affairs, the man may take charge of bringing money, and they meet together, have Deity at home, together chant Hare Kṛṣṇa. Where is the difficulty? That is unity. Combine together, working differently but for the same purpose, for pleasing Kṛṣṇa, then you will become happy. That is equality. Unity in variety." (Conversation, New Orleans, 31 July 1975) Contemporary life often doesn't allow the above social vision to fully manifest. It may be due to economic pressures (families often aren't able to manage with only one source of income) or to deeply ingrained social expectations (girls undergo as much formal education as boys, in pursuance of elbowing their way into the job market). Another issue, of course, is that men often don't possess the ethical and psychological requirements to qualify as true heads of the family, or as traditional *paterfamilias*; and artificially labeling all males as natural, qualified leaders can backfire.

Srila Prabhupada was promoting a lifestyle based on minimizing bodily needs and maximizing spiritual advancement. In the Vedic, *varnasrama* social model, not all couples were expected to remain at home for their

whole life. Husbands and wives of the *brahmanas* and *ksatriyas* classes would be encouraged to depart home and hearth to travel as *vanaprasthas* to holy places - or forests - to perform austerities and prepare for the final transition to their next life. Male *brahmanas* were also recommended to take *sannyasa* after this period of retirement, and to embrace renunciation as traveling mendicants and preceptors. Their wives would return home to be looked after by the grown-up sons, to become religious guides and cultural references for the younger generations. Srila Prabhupada's message was essentially simple and in line with the Vedic revelation: unrestricted sense gratification causes serious entrapment, at all levels, while developing pure love for God constitutes the ultimate goal of human life, the portal to eternal, blissful existence. Genders will interact - both for companionship, sex and child-rearing - but their dealings should be governed by *dharma*, the observance of God's laws. Those who disobey *dharma* will degrade and suffer, despite the occasional, fleeting, and illusory experience of "freedom" (another way of calling the enslavement to the senses). Srila Prabhupada presented social principles from the Vedic tradition, as well as from his personal experiences and observations. He endeavored to promote alignment with reality. Some of the things he

said about genders were common sense and unquestionable: "The man and woman unite, but the woman becomes pregnant, not the man." (Morning Walk, Perth, 8 May 1975) Such statements are universal and scientifically unassailable; other statements were more *aspirational* - portraying an ideal but not easily obtainable situation. His views were generally in line with worldwide traditional concepts of family life and genders' interaction, with the addition of a stronger emphasis on scientific spiritual advancement. But his presentation may appear as reactionary to those brainwashed by modern sociological theories, recent inventions from, say, the 1960s. Otherwise a large portion of what he suggested was consistent with how humans lived for thousands of years, with how men and women productively interfaced in all cultures and in all places. One might take that as primitive or retrograde, but the healthy underlying principles worked for countless generations in countless of places. In comparison, present "progressive" Western convictions appear myopic and dogmatic, raucously promoting "principles" that are fictional and untested; propagating ideas that are sophistic rather than scientific. Even with any amount of effort at explanations and apologetics, there will remain "a clash of civilizations" (or perhaps a clash between human and

animalistic outlooks). Modernistic society is not making people happy; it's not creating stable societies, healthy families, moral citizens, and wholesome children. Despite the blind eulogizing of permissive customs; despite the supine submission to sensual indulgence; despite the artificial, unproven assertions of equality between the genders, modern society is largely a failure. Those who fell hook, line, and sinker for modern materialistic imaginations about social life and the interaction of the genders, will probably hate Srila Prabhupada's teachings in this regard.

"Always Subordinate"

The "Vedic conception" envisions a hierarchy within the household, with the man, the husband, as superior and the woman, the wife, as subordinate: "Natural position is that the wife is under or subordinate to the husband. At least that is the Vedic conception . . . Even the queens of Kṛṣṇa . . . they are not ordinary woman; very exalted . . . every queen possessed a big, palatial building, and all the palaces were made of first-class marble . . . very, very opulent. But still, they were placing themself in the position of maidservant. They were also king's daughter, not ordinary

being. So that is the Vedic conception . . . according to the Vedic system, there is no equal right of the man and woman. The woman is always subordinate." (Lecture on SB 3.26.8, Bombay, 20 Dec 1974) For many contemporary people, this quote would represent the undisputable and irrefutable proof that Srila Prabhupada was, indeed, an inveterate and incurable sexist. For many the chapter could probably just finish here: "Where is the need to say more? The question in the title of this section - *Sexism in Srila Prabhupada's Teaching?* - can be conclusively answered in the affirmative. Yes, there is plenty of sexism in his teachings. Case closed." For the sake of saving time, I might be tempted to go along with that conclusion: yes, by contemporary standards and definitions, some of Srila Prabhupada's views certainly qualify as sexist. Yes, some of his statements, especially if taken out of context or according to particularly literal dictionary definitions, are not only sexists but inaccurate and objectionable in other ways. The rest of this section, though, will be dedicated to demonstrate: 1. aspects of his so-called sexism might be fully justified and ultimately beneficial for human society; 2. some of his so-called sexist remarks had been misrepresented or aggravated by taking them in isolation from a broader understanding; 3. there are many instances

in which he modified, qualified and mollified his so-called sexist statements; his message should therefore be considered as a whole, not in small fragments; 4. Srila Prabhupada was speaking of women - and of human beings in general - on different anthropological levels, and some assertions apply to one level but not to another; 5. his style, as we have seen, was at times impetuous; he often resorted to colloquial generalizations and even hyperboles; taking those expressions literally would be intellectually disingenuous; 6. some of what he said was the result of having received inaccurate information. Having said that, and notwithstanding all the textual contextualization, the defensive arguments, the vocabulary caveats, the linguistic cavils and the scholarly rationalizations, the International Society for Krishna Consciousness would still do well to distance itself from some of the things Srila Prabhupada said, attributing those statements to relative cultural influences, atypical use of words, and incorrect information he received - because promoting some of his sentences verbatim would be counterproductive. Ultimately as his followers we need to act in ways that please him. And Srila Prabhupada, I believe, would be very displeased if we simply parrot his words without considering the serious consequences that could accrue. I

also don't think we have the duty to strenuously attempt to completely sanitize every single sentence. It would be totally exhausting and possibly deceitful. In some cases (and I emphasize: "in some cases"; not in all cases) we could and should simply say: "Those were ideas Srila Prabhupada acquired in his earthly embodied experience from problematic sources or were expressions of his unconventional use of terminology; we do not identify with such statements; they don't constitute official positions of ISKCON." And then we should move on, remaining loyal to his spiritual, universal scriptural teachings, but cautious about what he spoke that didn't come directly from Vedic or mystical revelation. If you doubt it, do you have any evidence that Srila Prabhupada wanted that *everything* he ever said (in a car, in a private exchange, as a personal instruction, etc.) should become official ISKCON policy? I believe you would struggle to find *any* historical support for such a notion. Taking everything Srila Prabhupada spoke as impeccable and fit for broadcast might be the inclination of some of his less discriminating followers - and they have a right to their sentiments - but responsible ISKCON leaders should know better.

Srila Prabhupada was aware that his words about women were sometimes taken too literally, too immaturely, or used as a pretext to attempt to exorcise one's attachment to the opposite sex. His students at times misunderstood or exacerbated his teachings. In a private conversation, for instance, he instructed his disciples to treat all girls respectfully and protectively: "Girls should not be taken as inferior. You see? Sometimes... of course, sometimes scripture we say that, 'Woman is the cause of bondage.' So that should not be, I mean to say, aggravated. (laughs) That should not be aggravated, that 'Woman is inferior,' or something like that. So the girls who come, you should treat them nicely, at least. I heard that Gargamuni, after his wife left him, he became a woman-hater like that. (chuckles) That is not good. You see? . . . After all, anyone who is coming to Kṛṣṇa consciousness, man or woman, boys or girls, they are welcome. They are very fortunate. You see. And the idea of addressing '*prabhu*' means 'you are my master' . . . *Prabhu* means master . . . everyone shall treat others as 'my master.' This is the Vaiṣṇava system . . . Women, Godsisters, they should be nicely treated . . . That should be our policy." (Conversation, Seattle, 24 Sept 1968) He was aware that his warnings about loose association among the genders could indirectly generate

loathing and mistreatment of women by immature, underdeveloped men. So, certain expressions should not be taken too literally.

His Gender-Specific Language

Some might take this topic as a tiny detail while others may make a big deal of it. In his statement entitled "Gender Neutral," Jayadvaita Maharaja presents the current policy of the Bhaktivedanta Book Trust (BBT): "Srila Prabhupada completed his education in the first decades of the 1900's and wrote his books in the 1970's or earlier, before gender issues in the English language reached the level of attention they have lately assumed. He therefore used the pronoun 'he' not exclusively as the masculine pronoun but also as generic and inclusive for both sexes. Out of respect for Srila Prabhupada, the BBT does not intend to retrofit Srila Prabhupada's English to bring it in line with more recent ideas and practices regarding sexism. We hope that readers sensitive about these matters will read Srila Prabhupada's books with the

same spirit of broad-mindedness they extend toward other authors who wrote in previous days."[64]

In his article "Gender-Specific Pronouns in Srila Prabhupada's Books," Babhru Prabhu offers more details: "From time to time we hear, or hear about, complaints regarding Srila Prabhupada's use of gender-specific words as if they were generic. We find this throughout Srila Prabhupada's conversations and books . . . This raises the question in many minds today whether Srila Prabhupada's language is sexist, whether it reflects a sexist attitude in the author, and whether it perpetuates sexism among his followers. And it makes some wonder further how someone who lives on the transcendental platform and preaches the equal vision (*sama-darshanah*) Lord Krishna teaches in *Bhagavad-gita* could be unaware of the effects such sexist language might have on the minds of readers. Actually, this narrow slice of the gender issue should be an easy one for Srila Prabhupada's thoughtful followers to deal with. Compared with some of Srila Prabhupada's comments about women's relative intelligence, place in society, etc., this hardly seems a substantive issue. Until

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very recently, some time in the 1970s and more prominently in the 1980s, such usages were accepted as conventional and standard. Srila Prabhupada grew up in Victorian and Edwardian India in the late 19th and early 20th century, and was educated, as we know, at Scottish Church College in Calcutta. There he received a prestigious British education, studying English, Sanskrit, and Philosophy. We would expect, then, that he certainly learned the conventions of spoken and written English then current . . . And just what was standard in those days, not only in India but throughout the English-speaking world? Since the earliest recorded uses of English until the last 25 or 30 years of the 20th century, what we consider masculine personal pronouns (*he*, *him*, *himself*, *his*) were used generically and were accepted as referring to any person of either sex . . . The same was the case for words such as man, mankind, and words ending in –man . . . This is how Srila Prabhupada learned English in the early 20th century, and it's how his disciples learned English in the middle of the 20th century. These conventions came into question in the middle of the 20th century with the rise of feminist ideas, at first in academia, then in the broader society . . . Publication of Miller and Swift's *Handbook of Nonsexist Language* in 1980 brought

these issues to the public . . . So should readers consider Srila Prabhupada's use of so-called generic masculine words as sexist? If so, we would also have to judge the writing of some iconic feminist writers as sexist, too. Here's Mary Wollstonecraft, considered by many the mother of modern feminism, at the beginning of her landmark essay, *Vindication of the Rights of Women*: 'In what does man's preeminence over the brute creation consist? The answer is as clear as that a half is less than the whole; in Reason.' More recently, Virginia Woolf wrote such things as 'Every secret of a writer's soul, every experience of his life, every quality of his mind is written large in his works.' It would be awkward to accuse such writers of promoting or acquiescing to any notions of male dominance. What explains these constructions is convention: at the time these writers wrote these words, it was simply the standard to refer to human beings generically in such terms. Because this was the standard for so much of the history of English, most usage experts suggest that we simply accept that this was the case and judge the writers' intentions somewhat generously. Here's how Bryan Garner, author of *Garner's Modern American Usage* . . . says it: 'Those committed to nonsexist usage ought to adopt a statute of limitations that goes something

like this: in quoted matter dating from before 1980, passages containing bland sexism – such as the use of the generic he or of *chairman* – can be quoted in good conscience because in those days the notions of gender-inclusiveness were different from today's notions.' . . . just understanding a little of the history of these things may help us deal with any apparent disjuncture with the manners of our own time."[65]

The reader, he or she, can make up his or her mind on the subject. If he or she disagrees, or if he or she feels offended by the above, he or she can put down his or her book. Although sad to see him or her go, I wish him or her the best in his or her life; and thank him or her for his or her time.

Books as Bombs - in More than One Sense

Srila Prabhupada has compared his books to bombs: "Fight with maya means to drop thousand and millions of books

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into the lap of the conditioned souls. Just like during war time the Bombs are raining from the sky like anything." (Letter to Ramesvara, 3 Aug 1973) Already thousands and millions have greatly benefited from transcendental knowledge. Notwithstanding, his books could also act as bombs in completely unintended ways, with certain sentences exploding in the psyche of modern readers and creating a deep sense of rejection. Imagine an educated, financially independent, professional western lady (or, for that matter, any twenty-first century woman anywhere) reading the following: "As children are very prone to be misled, women are similarly very prone to degradation. Therefore, both children and women require protection by the elder members of the family . . . According to Cāṇakya Paṇḍita, women are generally not very intelligent and therefore not trustworthy." (Bg 1.40, purport) She could think, "What?!?! Women compared to children?! 'Women are generally not very intelligent'?! Who said that and on what basis?! Women are not trustworthy?! What about the many women that run entire countries as heads of government, often doing a better job than their male colleagues?! What about all the women researchers, professors, CEOs, lawyers, Supreme Court judges?! Are they also 'not trustworthy'?! And who the heck is this

Cāṇakya Paṇḍita guy anyway? Who wrote this book and why should I continue reading it? And why should I have anything to do with an organization that publishes these insulting, sexist remarks?" (I avoided including possible obscenities.) It wouldn't be surprising if at this point she closes the book, never to open it again. From now onward she might carefully avoid anyone and anything even remotely connected with the book. I have chosen a woman reader for illustration, but many men could also have similar reactions. The quoted excerpt is from a purport on the very first chapter of *Bhagavad-gita As It Is*. That's why some devotees have started advising those who purchase a copy of Srila Prabhupada's *Gita*: "Please skip the first chapter; there are so many Sanskrit names - Dhṛṣṭaketu, Cekitāna, Kāśirāja, Purujit, Kuntibhoja and so on - and actually the real philosophy only starts in the second chapter; so we suggest you start directly there." The real reason, though, is to prevent the person from encountering the above troublesome words. Yes, Srila Prabhupada's *Gita* has awakened thousands to spiritual life; it has connected millions to Krishna and His teachings; it has transformed the lives of people all over the world. This is all true. But it's also true that, especially nowadays, those words about women being less intelligent and

untrustworthy could prove radioactive; they might detonate in the mind like subtle bacteriological weapons, poisoning the person against ISKCON and its Founder-*Acarya*. They might be spiritually lethal for some. And the sentence quoted above is in no way an exception or an anomaly in BBT publications:

"Now, in the *Manu-saṁhitā* it is clearly stated that a woman should not be given freedom. That does not mean that women are to be kept as slaves, but they are like children." (Bg 16.7, purport)

"Women as a class are no better than boys, and therefore they have no discriminatory power like that of a man." (SB 1.7.42, purport)

"Generally, separation between husband and wife is due to womanly behavior; divorce takes place due to womanly weakness." (SB 4.4.3, purport)

"Although rape is not legally allowed, it is a fact that a woman likes a man who is very expert at rape." (SB 4.25.41, purport)

"Women in general are very much sexually inclined. Indeed, it is said that a woman's sex desire is nine times stronger than a man's . . . Generally women are very much passionate and are less intelligent." (SB 4.27.1, purport)

"Women are generally considered less intelligent." (SB 7.2.35, purport)

"However great a woman may be, she must place herself before her husband in this way; that is to say, she must be ready to carry out her husband's orders and please him in all circumstances . . . a woman must be trained to be submissive to the will of her husband." (SB 9.3.10, purport)

These are only limited examples from published commentaries. I didn't list anything from other recorded statements such as letters, lectures and conversations. I will address in detail some of the above ideas, attempting to illuminate the context and the reasoning behind the statements. But such sentences will remain toxic and indigestible for millions of contemporary people. In some cases, just one of those sentences might be enough to turn away a person for life. And even committed ISKCON

devotees experience bewilderment and perplexity about such statements. Therefore, some ISKCON leaders have been seriously contemplating what to do. In 2002, for instance, Devamrita Maharaja, GBC member, *sannyasi* and initiating spiritual master, wrote in his Vyasa-puja homage to Srila Prabhupada:

"In celebration of the Vyasa-puja of the founder-acarya, allow this useless soul to pose a question that both glorifies you and desperately begs an answer. What do we do about all those wonderful books you have left us? . . . Since your divine disappearance, twenty-five years have passed. I am wondering if times have changed, how, and to what degree. Thus I am begging for guidance. During your physical presence your books were our be-all and end-all. Now, have we entered, consciously or unconsciously, a new era of ISKCON known as 'PPB' - that is, 'post-Prabhupada's books'? More than a few seasoned devotees and supportive academics opine that indeed it's time to move on. Maybe, while maintaining our eternal gratitude to you, our founder-acarya, it's now necessary to evaluate what you have left us and distill whatever part of that legacy should accompany us into the future of a different world and a different ISKCON . . . What are your

expressed desires for your books in relation to the future of ISKCON? . . . How do you see your books in relation to both training future ISKCON devotees and enlightening the present nondevotee population? . . . What should we do and feel about purports that seem to clash with current scientific, gender, sociological, and political notions and niceties? . . . Can your books withstand time? That is, are the purports and language dated - if not now, then in the future? . . . Would we gain anything significant and lasting if ISKCON's leaders, in both word and example, rallied to exalt your books as the main basis of our cultural unity?" (Vyasa-puja Offering to Srila Prabhupada, 2002)[66] Online you can read the full text and the explanatory addendum.

It's beyond the scope of this book to delve into the questions - veritable spiritual dilemmas - that Devamrita Maharaja raises. More than 20 years have passed from his offering, and I don't see that ISKCON, as a Society, has significantly progressed in answering his questions. ISKCON Vaisnavas should study these questions and perhaps take some difficult decisions. Some of the needed

[66] http://www.devaswami.com/writings/to-srila-prabhupada/vyasa-puja-offering-to-srila-prabhupada-2002/

changes may appear unthinkable or heretical to most present ISKCON members; nonetheless, such choices might be most pleasing to the Founder-*Acarya*, as they are meant to protect and perpetuate his legacy, even if the new policies must involve some distancing from some of the things he said.

But, even if the BBT keeps choosing inaction (or timid action), there is still hope: in a few, short decades, the BBT will lose their exclusive right to print Srila Prabhupada's books - which will end in the public domain. Anyone may then be able to print *any version they like* of Srila Prabhupada's books. These new publishers - free from ossified, fossilized policies - will revise the books, removing all the (unnecessary!) sexist-sounding references. The books will then become much more "safe for consumption" by the public. Or else Srila Prabhupada's books will be largely replaced by completely new versions of the *Gita*, the *Bhagavatam*, and the *Caitanya-caritamrita*, etc., editions that may prove more relevant and impactful to the readers of the future. Just like Srila Prabhupada did not only reprint the books of his spiritual master or of Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakura, ISKCON devotees of the future might choose to write their own commentaries (it is

already happening), and those texts might reveal themselves more attractive to their contemporary readers. Srila Prabhupada will possibly be happier with the new approaches than with previous, petrified publishing preconceptions, which stubbornly clung to inexcusable practices (like keeping the "rape purport" in print). Such masochistic editorial choices may indicate a subtle impersonal contamination, in which considerations such as literalist fixations are given more weight than the pleasing of the Founder-*Acarya*. Since we are on the subject: we hear so much gabble and babble about the (imaginary) prohibition of editing a book after its author passes away. People appeal to some mundane academic model, tragically neglecting Vaisnava history and consequently unnecessarily creating clamor, confusion and misinformation. Srila Jiva Goswami continued editing Srila Rupa Goswami's works after Rupa's departure - as evidenced in a letter from Jiva to Srinivasa Acarya and Narottama Das Thakura referenced in the Bhakti-ratnakara. In fact, the only versions of Rupa Goswami's books we now possess are the ones edited - in his lifetime or posthumously - by Jiva Goswami.

Within the emotionally super-charged debates, we witness fundamentally three approaches on the matter of editing Srila Prabhupada's books:

1. Claims that his books should have been "frozen" the day he left this world. This is basically a materialistic approach, divergent from our Gaudiya tradition and practice (and contrary also to common sense; if a mistake is spotted, why preserving it in perpetuity?)

2. The mistakes that crept in the books, due to poor transcriptions or imperfect editing, should be fixed. This approach - the present BBT methodology - is more reasonable but has been erring, I believe, on the side of caution and timidity. As a result, counterproductive expressions - such as in the "rape purport" - still stare starkly in the face of the innocent reader.

3. The approach I suggest as the most effective and most loyal, is editing even more robustly, to avoid universally agitating (and unnecessary) statements that turn readers off (a scenario Srila Prabhupada would abhor). This policy, I believe, would most closely align with the essential Vaisnava motivation for editing, which should be to *please*

the author by making his or her words more effective and acceptable. Obviously, I am not talking about smoothing over attacks on materialistic or Mayavada conceptions, only about statements that, for instance, do not align with dictionary meanings, can cause a lot of condemnation, and do not really support the understanding of the reader; sentences such as "A woman who has no husband declares herself independent, which means that she becomes a prostitute." (SB 6.5.14, purport)

I have no doubt that Srila Prabhupada would approve any modifications that would remove (unnecessary) obstacles to the acceptance and appreciation of the readers; anything that would make his books more respected. When ("when," not "if") the radical but necessary changes take place, ISKCON temples and other bulk purchasers of Srila Prabhupada's books will choose the editions they believe most appropriately present the message for their current circumstances. They will buy the books they believe will most effectively help people become Krishna conscious. For mass distribution, the old editions will probably be replaced, but will be kept as precious historical, legacy references. Will the BBT keep existing? I hope so, but it would depend on how successfully the BBT

trustees unstuck themselves; on how quickly they stop dillydallying and shillyshallying and boldly take the necessary measures. The BBT survival is in their hands.

"Generally Less Intelligent"

I am going to try to salvage as much as I can from the expression that women are generally less intelligent. After all, this is a work of Vaisnava apologetics, and I will endeavor to find some rational support for an otherwise seriously troubling affirmation. Notwithstanding, regardless of how well I (or anyone else) can mitigate the toxicity of certain statements, I strongly recommend that ISKCON systematically and completely removes from its lexicon phrases such as "women are less intelligent" because they are dreadfully damaging to the movement's reputation and its capacity to relate with modern audiences. Besides considerations on the effect on the readers, it is also difficult to justify such affirmations from a linguistic and scientific perspective.

What does it mean that women are less intelligent? Certainly, it does not mean that of the eight billion humans on Earth, the four billion males are all more

intelligent than all the four billion females. It would be absurd to maintain such a notion. In fact, as we will see, Srila Prabhupada never meant it in that way. We therefore need to find alternative angles, substitute perspectives in which the sentence could have some more intelligible and defensible sense. I will start analyzing the idea of *intelligence* itself, and how it relates to men and women.

Intelligence: A Tricky Concept

Apparently in the world today there is not enough intelligence to define *intelligence*. It may be due to a lack of common framework - the absence of a shared conception of the nature of reality - or a lack of political will (any definition could end the promoter in hot water with this or that interest group), but *intelligence* remains a contentious and debated notion. *Wikipedia* reports: "The definition of intelligence is controversial, varying in what its abilities are and whether or not it is quantifiable." In other words, researchers can't agree on what to include within *intelligence* or if the measurement of intelligence can be universally standardized. Not a very encouraging start. The article continues, citing the result of a study published by the *Board of Scientific Affairs of the*

American Psychological Association: "when two dozen prominent theorists were recently asked to define intelligence, they gave two dozen, somewhat different, definitions."[67] Among the definitions listed, I particularly like the one by American psychologist Linda Gottfredson (a woman!), especially for its conciseness: "The ability to deal with cognitive complexity." We receive a lot of information through the senses (*jnanendriyas*). The mind (*manas*) handles these data packets, filtering them through likes and dislikes, emotions, memories, etc. The role of the intelligence (*buddhi*) is to cope with this "cognitive complexity" and hopefully assist the self (*atma*) to take sensible, *intelligent* decisions. As Krishna teaches in the *Bhagavad-gita*, when intelligent behavior is lost, the soul gets into real trouble (Bg 2.63). The physical apparatus through which intelligence operates is the brain. Being different from the innate discerning capacity of the self (the soul's own intelligence), the external intelligence is an aspect of the subtle psychic body (*suksma-sarira*); the brain is part of the "gross," physical, chemical body (*sthula-sarira*). The two are connected and somewhat interdependent. Just like right now I am writing using a computer. I am not the computer, and my writing capacity

[67] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Intelligence

is not in the computer, but I depend on the computer working properly to be able to produce this text. Should the computer - God forbid - suddenly stop functioning, my writing would be seriously affected. Similarly, although according to Vedic revelation, the intelligence is not *in* the brain, the configuration, structure, and health of the brain does affect its functioning. Which brings us to the very sensitive issue of the differences between the brains of men and women.

As this is not a neurological treatise, I will keep the technical details to a minimum. Please keep in mind: it's a jungle out there. Debates rage among neuroscientists about the degree of difference between the brains of men and women, and on how those neurological differences may affect the genders' behavior. The first obvious difference is size (more on that later). Brain size is proportional to body size, with men's brains being about 11% bigger than women's - but we find bigger differences in other internal organs such the heart, lungs, and kidneys, which are 17% to 25% larger in men. Some researchers passionately deny or minimize other brain distinctions. Some don't believe that those dissimilarities significantly influence the mentalities of the sexes (I call them *brain*

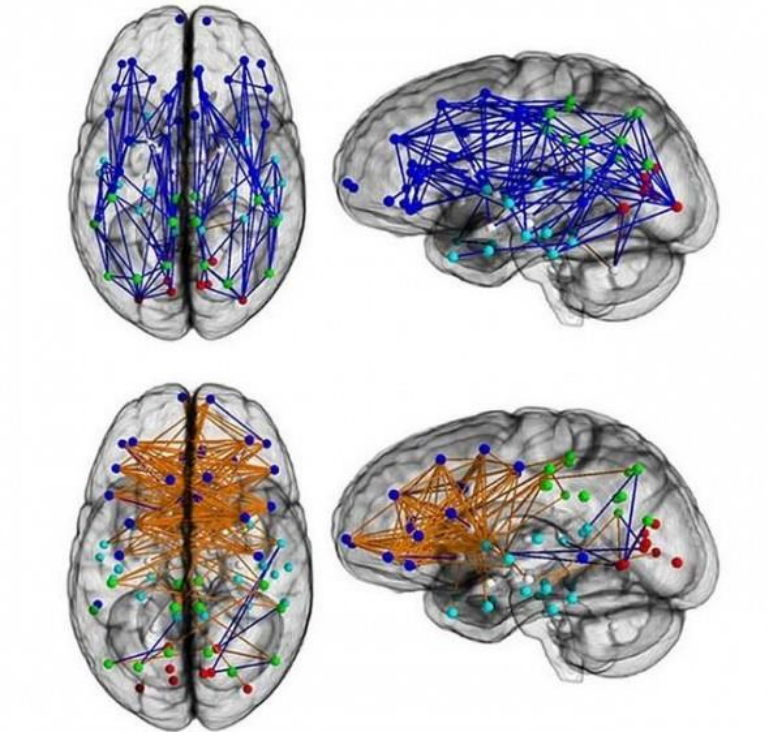
dimorphism agnostics). Others more readily embrace the scientific data that indicates clear differences. For instance, a 2017 *Stanford Medicine* article quotes psychology professor Diane Halpern, who explains about attitudes in the early 1990s: "Social psychologists and sociologists pooh-poohed the notion of any fundamental cognitive differences between male and female humans . . . At the time, it seemed clear to me that any between-sex differences in thinking abilities were due to socialization practices, artifacts and mistakes in the research, and bias and prejudice." But, after reviewing tons of specialized literature, she changed her mind. Why? She says that "There was too much data pointing to the biological basis of sex-based cognitive differences to ignore . . . For one thing, the animal-research findings resonated with sex-based differences ascribed to people. These findings continue to accrue. In a study of 34 rhesus monkeys, for example, males strongly preferred toys with wheels over plush toys, whereas females found plush toys likable. It would be tough to argue that the monkeys' parents bought them sex-typed toys or that simian society encourages its male offspring to play more with trucks. A much more recent study established that boys and girls 9 to 17 months old — an age when children show few if any signs of

A male baboon playing with a truck; a female baboon carrying a doll.

recognizing either their own or other children's sex — nonetheless show marked differences in their preference for stereotypically male versus stereotypically female toys." The article continues: "Halpern and others have cataloged plenty of human behavioral differences. 'These findings have all been replicated,' she says. Women excel in several measures of verbal ability — pretty much all of them, except for verbal analogies. Women's reading comprehension and writing ability consistently exceed that of men, on average. They outperform men in tests of fine-motor coordination and perceptual speed. They're more adept at retrieving information from long-term memory. Men, on average, can more easily juggle items in working memory. They have superior visuospatial skills: They're better at visualizing what happens when a complicated two- or three-dimensional shape is rotated in space, at correctly determining angles from the horizontal,

at tracking moving objects and at aiming projectiles . . . But the long list of behavioral tendencies in which male-female ratios are unbalanced extends to cognitive and neuropsychiatric disorders. Women are twice as likely as men to experience clinical depression in their lifetimes; likewise for post-traumatic stress disorder. Men are twice as likely to become alcoholic or drug-dependent, and 40 percent more likely to develop schizophrenia . . . Women, it's known, retain stronger, more vivid memories of emotional events than men do. They recall emotional memories more quickly, and the ones they recall are richer and more intense . . . New technologies have generated a growing pile of evidence that there are inherent differences in how men's and women's brains are wired and how they work." [68] Most relevant to our discussion is the notion of hemispheric symmetry. The brain is divided into two hemispheres - the right and the left side - each performing a distinct set of operations. The right hemisphere, for instance, controls the muscles on the left side of the body and vice versa. In general, the left hemisphere carries out logic and mathematical calculations. The right side deals with face recognition,

[68] https://stanmed.stanford.edu/2017spring/how-mens-and-womens-brains-are-different.html



Brain networks show increased connectivity from front to back and within one hemisphere in males (upper) and left to right in females (lower).

processing music and comprehending visual imagery. In connection with language, the right side is more involved in interpreting the context and the tone. To summarize: the left side is more about rationality and computation; the right side more about creativity, intuition and feelings. The *Stanford Medicine* article quoted above continues:

"The two hemispheres of a woman's brain talk to each other more than a man's do. In a 2014 study, University of Pennsylvania researchers imaged the brains of 428 male and 521 female youths — an uncharacteristically huge sample — and found that the females' brains consistently showed more strongly coordinated activity between hemispheres, while the males' brain activity was more tightly coordinated within local brain regions. This finding . . . tracks closely with others' observations that the corpus callosum-— the white-matter cable that crosses and connects the hemispheres — is bigger in women than in men and that women's brains tend to be more bilaterally symmetrical than men's." This notion is essential in our discussion of Srila Prabhupada's views on the intelligence of women. My conclusion: Srila Prabhupada speaks of a particular type of intelligence - one not necessarily covered by the usual definitions. He speaks of a form of cognitive predisposition that favors and facilitates philosophical and spiritual analysis, a brain that assists in discriminating spirit from matter and in developing knowledge-based detachment. In other words, an intelligence less enmeshed with (material) feelings and emotions; less influenced by (material) attachments and relationships. We could talk about a "Vedantic intelligence." The male brain, with its

stronger separation between right and left hemisphere, has the potential to minimize interferences to surgical discrimination. (Of course, most men do not use that capacity and simply think of booze, sex or football.) With a deliberate generalization and oversimplification, we could conclude that male brains are better for spiritual and philosophical life and female brains are better for managing material life and practicing religious life. In Srila Prabhupada's words: "Women in general are unable to speculate like philosophers, but they are blessed by the Lord because they believe at once in the superiority and almightiness of the Lord, and thus they offer obeisances without reservation. The Lord is so kind that He does not show special favor only to one who is a great philosopher. He knows the sincerity of purpose. For this reason only, women generally assemble in great number in any sort of religious function. In every country and in every sect of religion it appears that the women are more interested than the men." (SB 1.8.20, purport) Men's brains appear designed to stay in one operational mode at a time, either rational or emotional, which is not necessarily always an advantage. Female brains seem optimized for engaging both sides of the brain at once, combining analytical and intuitive thinking; to think rationally *and* with feeling *at*

the same time. This comes handy for functions requiring a high level of logical and emotional focus – such as taking care of children (and taking care of husbands). Women tend to be able to always maintain a degree of rationality even in emotionally charged situations. Men tend to "lose it" more easily; suddenly becoming unable to behave or think in a sensible way. In other words, men may completely shift from a rational mode (left side) to an emotional one (right side) and then act without considering the consequences. This, together with the characteristic male aggressivity, may help explain why in prisons all over the world the vast majority of inmates are male - in the US it's about ten incarcerated men for every woman (if men were really more intelligent across the board, why so many more of them end up in prison?). A 2013 global study by the *United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime* found that about 95 percent of all convicted homicide perpetrators were male. A similar consideration but from a different angle: the 2020 US data on homelessness shows men, at 69.6 percent of the total, being more than twice likely to become homeless than women, at 29.4 percent of the share of homeless individuals. Findings indicate that women were more likely to become homeless due to eviction and domestic

violence (in other words by the actions of others); whereas men were more likely to experience homelessness because of unemployment, alcohol abuse and jail release (often consequences of one's own actions). Women tend to be better at avoiding danger and conserving the status quo. They appear more prone to maintain balanced behavior and to shun extreme conduct - which are useful traits in the struggle for existence. These tendencies enable women to generally be better as caretakers and homemakers (and mothers).

What About IQ?

It turns out that tests have been generally rigged to produce equivalent results in the genders. The fact that *intelligence* doesn't have a fixed, incontrovertible definition makes such adjustments possible: test designers can arbitrarily choose which skills count as intelligence. They can fine-tune the weight of each element and tip the scales until they get the "gender-blind" results they seek. According to *Wikipedia*: "All or most of the major tests commonly used to measure intelligence have been constructed so that there are no overall score differences between males and females. Thus, there is little difference

between the average IQ scores of men and women."[69] Academic integrity *ki jaya*. Nonetheless, the crafty test crafters have not been able to iron out all divergences: "Differences have been reported, however, in specific areas such as mathematics and verbal measures." The *Wikipedia* entry continues, "Studies have also found that the variability of male scores is greater than that of female scores." In other words, human males are more likely to score very high or very low. In any case, Srila Prabhupada doesn't seem to merely refer to results of IQ tests when he speaks about dissimilarities in the genders' intelligence.

Intelligence as Detachment

In the Third Canto of *Srimad-Bhagavatam* Srila Prabhupada himself offers an angle to understand his statements about women being "less intelligent." He is talking about Devahuti, the mother of Kapiladeva, but he quickly turns his focus to women as a class: "As a woman, she had to love someone . . . generally all women desire material enjoyment. They are called less intelligent because they are mostly prone to material enjoyment." (SB

[69] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sex_differences_in_intelligence

3.23.54, purport). Basically, Srila Prabhupada seems to say that:

1. Women are more inclined to "love"; to develop emotional connections and attachments. This can be an obstacle to pure rational discrimination, or left-brain type of judgement. Obviously, men also need and desire love and affection, but Srila Prabhupada seems to say that women have a more marked proclivity for it.

2. Women are inclined to "material enjoyment." Obviously, most men are too, but here the message seems to be that in women the tendency is more prominent, perhaps manifesting in larger variety and intensity. Consider, for instance, the (usually greater) natural inclination of women to decorate their bodies with ornaments; to utilize larger varieties of clothes; to work on improving their looks by applying cosmetics and by carefully tending to their hair and nails.

3. Women's propensity for "material enjoyment" is given as the cause for being "less intelligent." It's a philosophical perspective and, again, not a matter of IQ. Fondness for mundane pleasures extends our permanence in this world of pain; a sign, therefore, of less intelligence; a symptom of failing to grasp the nature of conditioned existence. The more we are attached to the delights of the body, the more

we entangle ourselves in the cycle of birth and death. Certainly not an intelligent policy. Receiving the form of a woman seems to predispose the embodied soul to be more absorbed in the body and its by-products: monthly hormonal fluctuations; pregnancy (with its substantial physical and emotive involvement); giving birth - alongside with the lifelong, deep connection with the baby that has been nine months within their womb; lactation - an often protracted and complicated affair; the tendency towards being (more often than men) dissatisfied with their body image; the enhanced disposition toward investing time, money and energy in various aesthetic efforts to improve one's appearance... all these seem to indicate that Vedantic thought and a spirit of detachment (*jnana-vairagya*) may be generally more challenging for women.

Less Intelligent Than Whom?

Hearing that women are *less intelligent* one may conclude that they are less intelligent than men; but actually the situation is not that straightforward. Often Srila Prabhupada calls basically everyone as "less intelligent," an element that may mitigate the divisiveness and repugnance

that the statements on the lesser intelligence of women may provoke. This aspect is often overlooked, although it's a common theme in Srila Prabhupada's message. For instance, in one of his characteristic sweeping (but realistic) putdowns, he writes: "In human society all over the world there are millions and billions of men and women, and almost all of them are less intelligent because they have very little knowledge of spirit soul." (SB 2.3.1, purport). That's an egalitarian statement: *almost all men and women are less intelligent*; presumably compared to men and women of previous ages, in which spiritual awareness was more common, or to more spiritually enlightened beings in general. The syllogism is simple:

1. According to the Vedic evaluation, women belong to the same broad category of *śūdras* and *vaiśyas*: "Women, laborers and the mercantile class are on the same level." (SB 4.4.17, purport) They are all deemed less intelligent: "women, *vaiśyas* and *śūdras* are considered less intelligent." (SB 7.5.23-24, purport)
2. Everyone in this age is a *śūdra,* "according to the scriptures, everyone is a *śūdra*." (SB 3.22.16, purport)
3. Therefore practically everyone - man or woman - is *less intelligent*.

This conclusion might sound discouraging or even depressing, but at least it's not sexist (and it helps to explain why the world is in such a mess). Again, it's not just a question of IQ scores, but of values and self-awareness. Being identified with one's body - be it male or female - is the symptom of unenlightened people; regardless of what they may score on an IQ test. The following exchange offers a glimpse of an atypical definition of *intelligence* by Srila Prabhupada. He seems to delegitimize any form of intelligence that doesn't include awareness of the difference between the real self and the body. Srila Prabhupada says that only one who tries "to understand that spiritual identification" can be considered "intelligent":

Interviewer: Let me ask you. If through technological means mankind is somewhat improved, in other words, the average man is much more intelligent, what you would consider now to be an intelligent man...
Prabhupāda: But intelligent man... if one understands that he is not this body—he is within the body... just like you have got one shirt. You are not the shirt—anyone can understand—you are within the shirt . . .

Interviewer: But there are some very intelligent men who are not spiritually enlightened, perhaps even men who understand that . . . the body is not all, the body is dead and there is something else. Why aren't these men spiritually aware?

Prabhupāda: If one does not understand this simple thing, that he is not body, then he is no better than animal.

Interviewer: But...

Prabhupāda: That is the first understanding of spiritual platform. If he thinks that he is body, then he is in the same category as the animals are.

Rāmeśvara: Her question is... suppose someone has some faith in life after death, and he also may be an intelligent man by material standards . . .

Prabhupāda: No, material standard is no intelligence. Material standard is that "I am of this body." "I am American," "I am Indian," "I am fox," "I am dog," "I am man." This is material understanding. Spiritual understanding is beyond that . . . "I am not this body." And when he tries to understand that spiritual identification, then he is intelligent. Otherwise he is not intelligent.

(Interview with *Newsweek*, New York, 14 July 1976)

As often happens, Srila Prabhupada offers different definitions of the same term. His lexicon was... fluid, and therefore in interpreting his message we can't stick to commonplace definitions. On other occasions, for instance, he acknowledges that a materialist can be intelligent: "the materialistic class of men are undoubtedly very, very intelligent, but their intelligence is being used wrongly." (SB 7.9.11, Hawaii, 24 March 1969) Therefore we should be careful not to lock ourselves into a limited and limiting designation of a word, especially one as slippery as *intelligence*. In any case, based on *sastra*, Srila Prabhupada's estimate of the general situation is very bleak, regardless of gender: "In this age, people are not very intelligent . . . The Darwin's theory: 'Now the brain has evolved.' No. Actually, they are degrading. They are degrading. Formerly the brain was very sharp . . . We are all *alpa-medhasa*, less intelligent, in this age . . . in a harsh words, *alpa-medhasa* means rascal, less intelligent or no intelligence." (Lecture on SB 1.3.21, Los Angeles, 26 Sept 1972) But there is hope. For everyone.

"Kṛṣṇa Is Opening the Path for Everyone"

In a lecture, Srila Prabhupada energetically emphasized (he almost shouts; audio available[70]) that Krishna conscious women are "most intelligent": "Kṛṣṇa says. Although ordinarily we take *striya*—means women—*śūdra* and *vaiśyas* in the lower-class grade, but when one becomes a devotee . . . he is, or she is no more in the lower grade . . . ordinarily women is taken less intelligent; *śūdra* is taken less intelligent; *vaiśya* is taken less intelligent. But if he takes to Kṛṣṇa consciousness, he is the most intelligent. *Kṛṣṇa yei bhaje sei baḍa catura*. This is the statement in the *Caitanya-caritāmṛta*. Anyone who has taken to Kṛṣṇa consciousness, he is the most intelligent." (Lecture on SB 1.8.20, New York, 12 April 1973) In fact, he was lecturing on a verse spoken by a woman, Queen Kunti, whose deep theological teachings have been studied, recited, and revered by Vaisnavas for thousands of years. Srila Prabhupada often spoke about egalitarianism and equal opportunities on the spiritual platform: "One thing I must

[70] https://vanisource.org/wiki/730412_-_Lecture_SB_01.08.20_-_New_York

explain here. So far spiritual life is concerned, it does not depend on the material brain substance. It is different thing. It is spiritual platform. It has nothing to do with this bodily construction. You must remember. We don't make any distinction that a man can be better Kṛṣṇa consciousness than woman. No. A woman can be better Kṛṣṇa consciousness . . . So in the spiritual platform there is no such distinction, although in the material... just like the bodily construction of man is different from woman, similarly, the brain substance may be also different, but that does not disqualify any woman for spiritual advancement in Kṛṣṇa consciousness. That is clearly defined in the *Bhagavad-gītā* [Bg 9.32]:

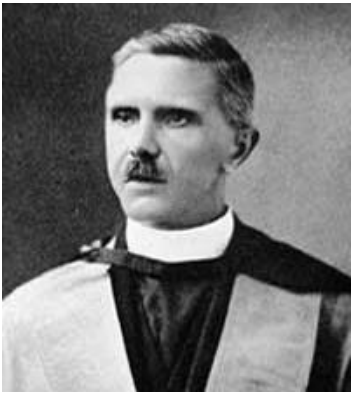
māṁ hi pārtha vyapāśritya
ye 'pi syuḥ pāpa-yonayaḥ
striyo śūdrā tathā vaiśyās
te 'pi yānti parāṁ gatim

It doesn't matter whether one is woman or a mercantile class of man or a *śūdra*. It doesn't matter. Because these classes are understood less intelligent. But Kṛṣṇa is opening the path for everyone . . . if he takes shelter of Kṛṣṇa specifically, then either he may be woman or he may be

śūdra, or laborer class, or may be mercantile class—it doesn't matter—he or she can go to the highest perfection." Srila Prabhupada consistently repeated the same message: "When one is elevated to the platform of Kṛṣṇa consciousness, whether one is a man, woman, *śūdra* or whatever, everyone is equal." (SB 9.14.36, purport) We should remember such declarations when we hear about women being less intelligent.

So far we have explored multiple angles of the notion of *intelligence* and of how Srila Prabhupada used the word, often in uncommon ways. Especially when it came to disparity of intelligence between the genders, he applied unconventional criteria such as proclivity for material enjoyment. Another aspect of why Srila Prabhupada spoke about women as less intelligent involves an erroneous notion he imbibed in his youth: he was taught an inaccurate estimate of the maximum size of male and female brains.

Brain Size Blues



Rev. Dr. W. S. Urquhart

Prabhupāda: I was educated in Scottish Churches College. The philosophy professor, Dr. W. S. Urquhart, he was very friendly to me, very kind, just like father . . . he became vice-chancellor. He was a very learned man, and very nice man, W. S. Urquhart . . .

Harikeśa: He was the one who said that the woman's brain is thirty-six ounces?

Prabhupāda: Yes, yes. (chuckles) Yes. No, not only he, another professor, Dr. Stephen, he also said. That's a fact. (Morning Walk, Durban, 6 Oct 1975)

Actually, it's not a fact, as we will see. How much can we fault Srila Prabhupada? He heard the false factoid in college, from a professor he admired, and took it as valid. We could take this acceptance as an expression on his respect for authority - but the idea is demonstrably wrong, ostensibly a relic of unscientific, sexist prejudice. Srila Prabhupada didn't invent it; he received it, but he repeated

it - and the damage was done; and the Internet won't forget. The issue is that the brain comparison statement wasn't just casually mentioned once or twice and then overlooked. No, it was repeated in multiple places and circumstances, from informal exchanges to TV interviews, from lectures in ISKCON temples to a speech at a university. And his disciples, apparently, didn't provide him with more reliable information. This wrong idea might have played a part in shaping Srila Prabhupada's outlook on gender. By extension, it became a pillar of ISKCON's subconscious mindset on women. This false notion of brain sizes assisted in cementing a sexist attitude among ISKCON members; especially when added to other questionable or easily misinterpreted citations (e.g.: Canakya Pandita's dicta); when added to the struggles of aspiring and perspiring male celibates (seeing women as enemies to be neutralized and exorcised); and when added to whatever prejudice men already carried due to their own conditioning and background. In Montreal, in 1968, Srila Prabhupada also spoke about brain sizes but then conceded that there is no difference between man and woman as far as Krishna consciousness. Notwithstanding, many, not only women, might find his reason of why "a

woman can be better" as disagreeable ("Because they are very simple"):

Prabhupāda: Actually a man becomes intelligent by the greater amount of brain substance. It is a psychological fact. It is called celebrum... doctor knows. What is called?
Doctor: Cerebrum. Cerebrum cortex.
Prabhupāda: Yes. So psychology... I was student of psychology in my college life. Dr. Urquhart said, I remember still, that the brain substance of man has been found up to 64 ounce, while brain substance of woman has been found, highest, 34 ounce. Therefore woman class (laughs) is not so intelligent as man. There is no question of competition. It is actual, scientific fact . . . But one thing I must explain here. So far spiritual life is concerned, it does not depend on the material brain substance. It is different thing. It is spiritual platform. It has nothing to do with this bodily construction. You must remember. We don't make any distinction that a man can be better Kṛṣṇa consciousness than woman. No. A woman can be better Kṛṣṇa consciousness, because they are very simple. They can accept any religious system. Generally the women, they accept it, because they are very simple. They have no crooked mind. Sometimes they are exploited, therefore." (Lecture on SB 1.2.6, Montreal, 3 Aug 1968)

Regarding brain size and gender roles, a particularly dynamic exchange took place in Chicago, in 1975, as Srila Prabhupada social views clashed with the convictions of the woman TV reporter. In the discussion after the interview, the devotees try to clarify some ideas:

Harikeśa: The scientists have the theory that the brain, the intelligence is measured by creases in the brain, creases, not by size . . . In this brain weight matter, the sixty-four ounce and thirty-six ounce, is that every brain, male brain, is...?

Prabhupāda: No, no.

Harikeśa: No. That is what they think you've said, that every male brain is sixty-four ounces, every woman is thirty-six ounces.

Prabhupāda: No, no. The highest brain substance found in man is sixty-four ounce.

Harikeśa: They did not understand that.

Satsvarūpa: He said it clearly.

Prabhupāda: And the highest brain substance in woman found, thirty-six ounce. So that proportion is always there.

It may be twenty-ounce, forty-ounce, but brain substance in man is more than the woman. That is a fact, always. (Conversation after Press Conference, Chicago, 9 July 1975)

Actually the "proportion" is not "always there" and some women have larger brains than men. Regardless, a larger brain - male or female - doesn't necessarily mean a sharper intelligence. The dialogue goes on, and Brahmananda Swami is onto something, how data can be manipulated by cultural bias:

Brahmānanda: You've used the example of this, that woman is less intelligent of the size of the brain, given by one professor in 1920. So they took offense to this because their idea is that what might have been scientific fact in 1920, in 1975 is not scientific fact . . . they might be able to bring some scientist who would say in 1975 that according to their calculations, there is no difference between the brain of a woman and the brain of a man.

Prabhupāda: Yes.

Brahmānanda: In other words, that what is considered scientific fact, that changes according to the social ideas that are prevalent in a particular time.

Prabhupāda: No, no. Social ideas, there is no standard social idea. That is another thing. You can change in any way. But so far physiological conditions, that has not changed. The feature of the woman's body has not changed. So how the brain will change? The bodily feature of woman as it was in 1920, it is still going on. Outwardly we see. So how inwardly it is changed? In 1920 the woman was becoming pregnant. So there is no change now, that man is pregnant. So how you say there is change?

Brahmānanda: I don't know, but she said that they have spoken to scientists and that scientists say that the woman's brain . . . now a scientist says a woman's brain and a man's brain is not different.

Nitāi: No, no. She said that even though the woman's brain may be smaller, that that doesn't make a difference in intelligence.

Harikeśa: No, they think it is the creases in the brain. Just like Einstein had a very small brain, but there were many creases, so they say that's why he was very intelligent, because there were creases.

(Conversation after Press Conference, Chicago, 9 July 1975)

This is obviously not a convention of neurologists, and the dialogue appears to be mostly an exchange of hearsays. But they've got Einstein's brain right: his brain reportedly weighed slightly below average at 1.23 kg (43.38 ounces). I have no evidence that his disciples - bless their hearts - ever attempted to corroborate or debunk the notion of the maximum size of male and female brains; and the damage was done. In 1975 you could not just Google it, but any of them could phone a university or a hospital and ask: "Good morning; may I speak with the neurology department? Thank you. Yes, good morning doctor, we are doing a research project and we would like to find out what's the latest information on the size and weight of male and female human brains. Especially what's the highest recorded weight for men and for women." Plus, there must have been some encyclopedias talking about these things. They would have probably found out enough information to put to rest, once and for all, Dr. Urquhart's pronouncement that the maximum weight of male brain is 64 ounces (1.81 kg) and of female brain is 36 (1.02 kg). Today we do have access to powerful search engines and so we can easily find plenty of relevant information. What I found is that different sources offer slightly different but comparable data for average brain weight. A paper

published on the site of the *United States National Center for Biotechnology Information* says: "Based on more than 8000 autopsies . . . The average brain weight of the adult male was 1336 gr; for the adult female 1198 gr."[71] *Wikipedia* offers: "Average adult male brain weight is 1,345 gram (47.4 oz), while an adult female has an average brain weight of 1,222 grams (43.1 oz)."[72] A *Scientific American* article tells us that: "An MRI study of 46 adults of mainly European descent found that the average male had a brain volume of 1,274 cubic centimeters (cm^3) and that the average female brain measured 1,131 cm^3 . . . the average male brain weighs about 1,325 grams."[73] Therefore, according to the three above sources, the average male brain weighs between 46.73 and 47.44 ounces, while the average for women is between 41.48 and 43.1 ounces. Srila Prabhupada reported 34 or 36 ounces as the maximum weight of women's brain, but, even in the most conservative calculation, the *average* woman's brain is more than 14 percent heavier than the 36 ounces Dr. Urquhart declared as the *maximum* weight.

[71] https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/8072950/
[72] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brain_size
[73] https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/does-brain-size-matter1/

(Taking 43.1 ounces as the average and 34 ounces as the maximum, the *average* woman brain would be 23.6 percent heavier than the good Scotsman's estimation for *maximum* weight.) So, Dr. Urquhart account was certainly off. But the *Scientific American* article goes further, indicating that the lightest male brain has been calculated to be 38.62 ounces while the minimum weight for women is 35.76 - in other words, what the Scottish Church College taught as the *maximum* weight is actually the *minimum*. For the maximum woman brain's weight, the *Scientific American* article gives 51.28 ounces - a whopping 35% more than the proverbial "highest brain substance in woman" of 36 ounces. Besides, it's not a fact that a bigger brain necessarily indicates a finer intellect, although Srila Prabhupada's teachers had taught him so: "Our professor—he was a Scotsman—he explained . . . that the more brain substance is there, more one becomes intelligent." (Lecture on SB 1.3.21, Los Angeles, 26 Sept 1972) This was plainly wrong. An outdated theory. As an illustration, the brain of Russian novelist and Oxford honorary doctorate recipient Ivan Turgenev weighted more than 2 kg - 2,021 grams - a massive 71.28 ounces - whereas the brain of French writer and Nobel Prize for Literature Anatole France was roughly half of that at 1,017

grams - 35.87 ounces - even less than the fictional 36 ounces as uppermost for women. Just as pseudo-scientific ideas on race were used to legitimize the persecution and enslavement of certain groups, wrong beliefs on brain size (and on the correlation between brain size and intelligence) might influence our views of women. Srila Prabhupada's opposition to gender equality appears at least partly based on the mistaken information he had received:

Prabhupāda: In Chicago I said, all women, "You cannot have freedom. You have got only thirty-four-ounce brain, and man has got sixty-four-ounce." I told them. So I became a subject of very great criticism. (laughs) (laughter)

Trivikrama: Women's liberation.

Prabhupāda: Yes. I denied, "No, you cannot have." I told them . . . One girl in the airship . . . I frankly said that "No, no. You cannot have equal rights because your brain is thirty-four ounce." Actually that's a fact . . . How can I give you equal rights, because your brain is less substance.

(Morning Walk, Bombay, 9 Jan 1977)

Would Srila Prabhupada's views have changed had he received more rigorous neurological information? An article in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*

written in 1899 (when Srila Prabhupada was 3 years old), reveals that the idea that people with larger brains possess greater intelligence had already become obsolete years before Srila Prabhupada's college days: "Opinions regarding the weight of the brain being an index of intelligence have fluctuated within wide limits. Before the days of cerebral localization there were many physiologists who believed that an individual's intelligence was directly proportionate to the total weight of the encephalon. A large brain meant large mentality. As the encephalon began to be more closely investigated and the post-mortem records were more carefully compared, it was discovered that large brains were not always possessed by those who exhibited the highest intelligence. In fact some of the greatest thinkers in the world were the owners of brains much below the average in absolute weight and size. This apparently upset the earlier physiologic dicta in regard to mind activity being dependent on the physical brain."[74] Srila Prabhupada's Scottish professors inculcated in him odd data from an already outdated model. We will never know how much of it was just their archaic "science" and how much, if any, their sexist prejudice - but what they taught wasn't right. We will also never know to what

[74] https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jama/article-abstract/475648

extent the false information Srila Prabhupada received affected his views on women. Even giving Dr. Urquhart the benefit of the doubt as far as bias or motivation (after all, he probably received those specifications from someone else), Dr. Urquhart's factoids had been exposed as incorrect and misleading, both conceptually and in terms of measurements.

For comprehensiveness' sake, let's also remember that Dr. Urquart - who, after all, was very dear to Srila Prabhupada - together with his wife was instrumental in promoting women's education: "A notable achievement of the Scottish Church College was the introduction of systematic under-graduate co-education. Although girl students were admitted in one or two men's colleges in Calcutta the Scottish Church College adopted co-ed as a definite policy . . . It was largely due to the efforts of Dr. and Mrs. Urquhart that co-education attained great popularity and magnitude in the Scottish Church College. Dr. Urquhart added the Zoology Department to the College and opened the B.T. Department for women."[75] This should mitigate exaggerated suspicions about Dr. Urquart's sexism. As far as the brain weight discrepancies,

[75] https://www.scottishchurch.ac.in/college_history.php

we wonder how Dr. Urquhart or his sources could come to such conclusions; no reliable autopsy reports were available at the beginning of the twentieth century? The situation reminds me of Bertrand Russel's quip: "Aristotle maintained that women have fewer teeth than men; although he was twice married, it never occurred to him to verify this statement by examining his wives' mouths." (From *The Impact of Science on Society*, 1951) I mean, weighing a bunch of dead brains is not exactly rocket science. How that false impression could have been created and perpetuated within the academic environment? I don't envision the International Society for Krishna Consciousness suing the Scottish Church College for damage, but those miscalculations did create substantial distortion and embarrassment, and the repercussions may last for centuries.

Women as Slaves? Seriously?!

Sometimes Srila Prabhupada's choice of words, especially in informal conversations, wasn't the most guarded, as when, during a morning walk he speaks of women as slaves to their husbands, glossing the Sanskrit and simply borrowing an exaggerated expression from a foreigner:

"The women are declaring 'independent.' They are begging door to door to a man, 'Please give me shelter. Give me a child,' and they're independent. Hmm? One American woman was . . . speaking that 'In India the women are treated as slave. We don't want.' So I told her that it is better to become slave of one person than . . . slave of . . . hundreds. (laughter) The woman must become a slave. So instead of becoming slaves of so many persons, it is better to remain satisfied a slave of one person . . . our Vedic civilization says, *narī-rūpaṁ pati-vratam*: 'The woman is beautiful when she remains as a slave to the husband.' That is the beauty, not the personal beauty. How much she has learned to remain as a slave to the husband, that is Vedic civilization." (Morning Walk, Mayapur, 19 March 1976) Actually, *slave* is not the literary translation of *pati-vratam*. In this speech Srila Prabhupada is simply picking the word *slave* from his American interlocutor and somehow keeps employing it again and again. *Pati* means husband or protector, and *vrata* refers to a solemn vow, a sacred commitment - in this case of loyalty to the spouse. In fact, later, during the same exchange, Srila Prabhupada uses a closer rendition: "*narī-rūpaṁ pati-vratam* . . . the beauty of woman is how much she is devoted and obedient to the husband." On another occasion he quotes the same

Sanskrit verse: "*Nari-rūpaṁ pati-vrataḥ*: 'Woman's beauty is how she is faithful to her husband' . . . If a woman is trained up not to talk with any other man except her husband, that is her beauty." (Conversation, Los Angeles, 23 June 1975) Chastity, modesty, morality, firm spousal faithfulness, satisfaction in serving a noble, caring companion, these attributes will make *any* woman attractive, imbuing her expression, demeanor and bearing with a higher-order beauty, a virtuous composure, an emotional wholesomeness that transcends and subsumes the mere shape of her body. But this may also sound as a sexist concept. Someone may protest: "Why can't a woman be beautiful by herself, as a free-spirited and autonomous individual?" Sure, a woman can be beautiful, in more than the physical sense, even if not married. That Sanskrit stanza comes from a different epoch. In ancient India women were systematically protected from exploitation through early marriage. Girls would be betrothed very young, practically as children, and, upon reaching puberty, they would move in with their husbands. Virtually all women were married - that was the standard. It's easy to despise and dismiss the wisdom of such an arrangement from a different time and culture, but the system had a strong internal consistency and, more

importantly, it worked. It produced a higher level of satisfaction in both men and women; and it made society more stable, more moral, and more opulent. But imagine taking a sentence out of the above conversation and publishing it separately from its context: "The woman must become a slave." The scandal! The shock! The condemnation! A colloquial gloss during a morning stroll can destroy Srila Prabhupada's name - and even severely affect some devotees' faith. But compare that statement with another speech by Srila Prabhupada, this time at the marriage of some of his disciples: "The husband will help the wife, the wife will help the husband in advancing in Kṛṣṇa consciousness." Later Srila Prabhupada guides the husbands through their vows: "I accept her as my wife . . . and take charge of her . . . throughout her life . . . and shall see to her comfort, provide with all necessities of life, without thinking of any personal gratification . . . and we shall work together for prosecuting Kṛṣṇa consciousness." (Wedding Lecture, Boston, 6 May 1969) Does it sound like slavery to you?

Blasting Away on Juhu Beach

Srila Prabhupada grew up and operated in an epoch and environment in which certain expressions, although technically inaccurate, wouldn't attract the same level of censure and opprobrium that they may generate nowadays. For instance, in the conversation we quoted above, Srila Prabhupada said, "Where is woman philosopher, mathematician, scientist? Not a single." (Morning Walk, Bombay, 9 Jan 1977) This is demonstrably incorrect. And the fact that it was uttered within an informal stroll on Juhu beach doesn't make it less damaging. History (or the Internet) might not show particular clemency considering that Srila Prabhupada was in a particularly feisty mood in that conversation, which dealt, among other themes, with a court case against ISKCON and other forms of opposition to his movement. Srila Prabhupada lambasts one and all: "I condemn everyone, that 'You are all dogs and hogs.' And United Nation a pack of dogs only." Will critics be mollified by the fact that moments later he somewhat refined and qualified his statement about women? "How they can have equal rights? Up to date in the history there is not a single woman who is a great scientist or great philosopher or

great..." So, Srila Prabhupada did acknowledge that there have been women scientists and philosophers; but they weren't "great" - whatever that means. His argument, expressed in the heat of a stormy exchange - appears puzzling: women shouldn't have equal rights because - allegedly - there were no great scientists or philosophers among them? Should men of average or limited intellectual capacity enjoy more rights than women because some rare great scientists were male? The logic appears questionable. Dr. Patel, the companion of so many morning walks and so much verbal sparring, starts arguing: "Madame Curie was expert..." but Srila Prabhupada cuts

Srila Prabhupada with Dr. Patel on Juhu Beach, Bombay (Mumbai).

him short: "All bogus." Anyway, that morning Srila Prabhupada was in a particularly fierce and dismissive mood: "Government means a set of rascals." He wasn't sparing anyone: "Aldous Huxley. He is useless." Jawaharlal Nehru and Gandhi don't fare much better. The atmosphere was relaxed, the expressions hyperbolic, the syntax easygoing and the tone often humorous (the transcriber reports 16 instances of laughter). You can hear the whole recording. [76] Hopefully future generations would take the context in consideration; an 80-years old religious leader on an Indian beach unreservedly denouncing the follies of the world, bashing and lashing at everything and everyone - not just women. Objectively speaking, portions of what Srila Prabhupada said cannot be supported; but we love him also *because* of his occasional outsized outbursts of objectionable, outrageous outspokenness.

A Peculiar Use of "Prostitute"

Continuing the analysis of Srila Prabhupada's super-heavy and super-controversial statements, we come across an

[76] https://vanisource.org/wiki/770109_-_Morning_Walk_-_Bombay

affirmation in the *Srimad-Bhagavatam*, therefore a public, official assertion: "A woman who has no husband declares herself independent, which means that she becomes a prostitute." (SB 6.5.14, purport) Calling prostitutes all women refusing to enter wedlock appears... audacious - and a primary candidate for accusations of sexism. Should we label *prostitute* every woman who values her own social, civic and financial autonomy, and thus declines or delays getting married? Technically, a *prostitute* is someone who engages in sexual activity for payment. Obviously Srila Prabhupada doesn't use *prostitute* in its dictionary definition - certainly not all unmarried women engage in sex for money - but in the general sense of a promiscuous woman, one with multiple sexual partners. Even this indirect meaning, though, appears seriously problematic. First of all, not all unmarried women have sex. One may also wonder, what about men? if all non-celibate women are prostitutes (even if not receiving payments for their sexual favors), what should we consider the non-celibate males? We must conclude that Srila Prabhupada's used the word *prostitute* in a very anomalous and unconventional sense. Srila Prabhupada's purport goes on, now attacking miniskirts. Let's consider that he was writing in the mid-1970's, at the cusp of the popularity of

this piece of clothing. According to *Wikipedia*: "Hemlines were just above the knee in 1961, and gradually climbed upward over the next few years. By 1966, some designs had the hem at the upper thigh . . . Before that time, short skirts were only seen in sport and dance clothing, such as skirts worn by female tennis players, figure skaters, cheerleaders, and dancers . . . From 1969 onwards, the fashion industry largely returned to longer skirts such as the *midi* and the *maxi* . . . [miniskirts] disappeared from mainstream fashion by the mid-70s."[77] For a cultured gentleman who had lived most of his life in India, arriving in America in 1965 and witnessing the widespread wearing of miniskirts and microskirts must have been quite a cultural shock. Srila Prabhupada writes: "A prostitute generally dresses herself in various fashions intended to attract a man's attention to the lower part of her body. Today it has become a much advertised fashion for a woman to go almost naked, covering the lower part of her body only slightly, in order to draw the attention of a man to her private parts for sexual enjoyment. The intelligence engaged to attract a man to the lower part of the body is the intelligence of a professional prostitute." (SB 6.5.14, purport) I won't try to investigate if the wearing of

[77] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Miniskirt

miniskirts represents an intentional effort at sexual provocation or simply the following of a fashion (the answer, anyway, would have to be on a case-by-case basis). We nonetheless concur that a public showing of legs doesn't represent an expression of ladylike modesty or a sign of chastity. In fact, the wearing of miniskirts could be even interpreted as a form of sexist abuse: imposing the display of female anatomy on the easily aroused male minds, thus inciting sensual fantasies and sexual desires. It's a form of violence; like the behavior of flashers, who expose themselves in public. "Miniskirt, trying to show the private part and people will be attracted and she will be happy. This is regular prostitution. Regular prostitution." (Conversation, London, 15 Aug 1971) Here Srila Prabhupada seems to indicate a subtle promiscuity, which also gets branded as *prostitution* - although there isn't necessarily any money exchange or even sexual contact. Ironically, an online vendor offers "devotional" miniskirts such as "Hare Krishna Mini Skirts"; "Iskcon Mini Skirts"; and even, believe it or not, the "Prabhupada Mini Skirts." For 37 US dollars you can buy a miniskirt portraying Srila Prabhupada singing and playing harmonium. (But probably playing a sad tune...).

So, Srila Prabhupada gives the word *prostitution* a much broader connotation than the common dictionary definition: "Now, at the present moment, father, mother, sends the daughter for prostitution: 'Find out a suitable man. Attract a suitable man. Don't marry abruptly. Just test this man, this man, this man, this man, this man. Then marry.' So father-mother, they are teaching daughters prostitution." (Lecture on SB 6.1.56-62, Surat, 3 Jan 1971) It appears that in Srila Prabhupada's lexicon *prostitution* goes from the regular definition of engaging in sex for money; to having sex with many partners (even if for free); to remaining unmarried (but presumably sexually active); to dress in suggestive fashion; and to other unconventional applications. He even spoke of prostitution in connection with consensual sexual intercourses between husband and wife: "sex life with one's wife is equal to prostitution if the regulations are not properly followed." (SB 3.14.33, purport) Srila Prabhupada used the term in a number of non-standard ways, sometimes indicating with "prostitution" various kind of corruption or excesses: "Gold-standard currency is based on falsehood . . . This artificial inflation of currency by the authorities encourages prostitution of the state economy . . . Instead of paper currency, actual gold coins should be used for

exchange, and this will stop prostitution of gold." (SB 1.17.39, purport) He also spoke of "prostitution of the senses": "Just like a woman prostitute is not satisfied with one man. Similarly, our tongue is like prostitute. It is not satisfied with simple foods. Sometimes here, sometimes there, sometimes on the street, sometimes on the restaurant, sometimes a hotel . . . It is called tongue prostitution. There are prostitution of three things: prostitution of the tongue, prostitution of the belly and prostitution of the genital . . . the prostitution of the senses." (Conversation, Hyderabad, 22 Aug 1976) I would suggest that people shouldn't become too disturbed; words do shift their significance, adopting new imports. Srila Prabhupada creatively and liberally stretched the word *prostitution* beyond its dictionary meaning; but nothing personal - he simply stressed, in his own original style, the importance of civilized restraint.

Beating the Wife? When Context is Everything

Let's analyze the following conversation. This is how it was quoted on a website:

Room Conversation—April 12, 1969, New York – Prabhupada: So *sasan ke adhikari* means they should be punished. (laughs) Punished means, just like *dhol*, when the, I mean to say, sound is not very hard, *dag-dag*, if you beat it on the border, then it comes to be nice tune. Similarly, *pasu*, animals, if you request "My dear dog, please do not go there." Hut! (laughter) "No, my dear dog. Hut!" This is the way. Similarly, woman. If you become lenient, then she will be troublesome. So in India still, in villages, whenever there is some quarrel between husband wife, the husband beats and she is tamed. [End of quote.]

The reader might conclude that Srila Prabhupada is condoning or even encouraging corporal punishment for "troublesome" wives. It may appear that, by talking about it, he approves of such Indian villagers' practice, but when we look at the context, the story changes completely. Srila Prabhupada defines such beatings as "uncivilized." And the section starts with Srila Prabhupada's criticism of Tulsi Dasa's literary treatment of women:

"Tulasī dāsa . . . in many passages of his poetry he has not done very justice to woman . . . he writes . . . *Dhol guṇār paśu śūdra narī, ihe sab śaśan ke adhikārī. Dhol, dhol* means drum, *mṛdaṅga. Guṇār, guṇār* means . . . a fool,

fool. Illiterate fool . . . *Dhol guṇār śūdra*, and the laborer class, *śūdra*. Three. *Dhol*, *guṇār*, *śūdra*, and *paśu*, household animals, just like cows, dogs . . . *Dhol guṇār śūdra paśu* and *narī*. *Narī* means woman. Just see. He has classified the *narī* amongst these class, *dhol*, *guṇār*, *śūdra*, *paśu*, *narī*. *Ihe sab śaśan ke adhikārī*. *Sasan ke adhikārī* means all these are subjected for punishment . . . So *śaśan ke adhikārī* means they should be punished. Punished means, just like *dhol*, when the, I mean to say, sound is not very hard, *dag-dag*, if you beat it on the border, then it comes to be nice tune. Similarly, *paśu*, animals, if you request, 'My dear dog, please do not go there.' 'Hut!' No, 'My dear dog.' 'Hut!' This is the way. Similarly, woman. If you become lenient, then she will be troublesome. So in India still, in villages, whenever there is some quarrel between husband-wife, the husband beats and she is tamed. In civilized society, 'Oh, you have done this?' Immediately some criminal case. But in uncivilized society they don't care for court or civilized way of..." [From the transcription it appears that at this point food is being served; and then someone changes the topic of the discussion.] (Conversation, New York, 12 April 1969)

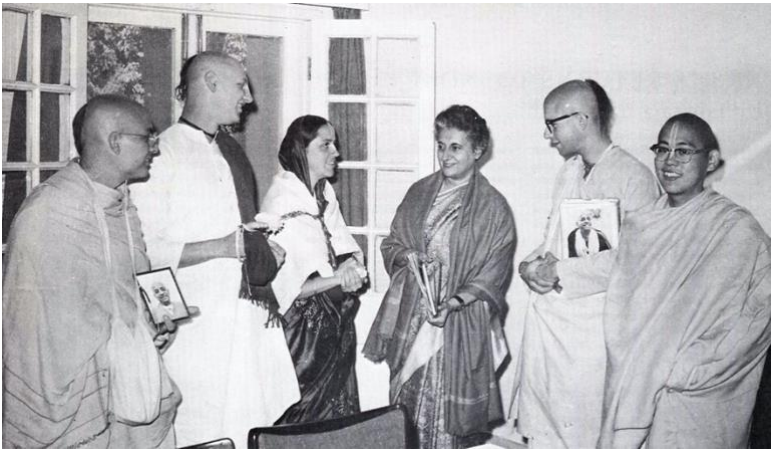
In other words: Srila Prabhupada describes the beating of wives as "uncivilized," but the selective cut-and-paste

makes it look as he approved it. The lesson: be wary of snippets of quotes that might leave the actual "punch line" out.

No Responsible Posts for Women?

Once, in England, Srila Prabhupada said: "The law of primogeniture [the right to succession belonging to the firstborn child] . . . The eldest child... in your country, even the eldest child is a girl, she also occupies the throne. Just like present Queen Elizabeth. Formerly there was Queen Victoria; before that, another Elizabeth. But in India woman has no such right. The woman is never given any responsible post." (Lecture on SB 5.6.2, Vrindavana, 24 Nov 1976) Let's pause and consider; at the time Srila Prabhupada was speaking, in 1973, Indira Gandhi was the prime minister of India. She had already been prime minister for more than seven years (she served in that role from January 1966 to March 1977 and again from January 1980 until her assassination in October 1984). The statement that "in India . . . The woman is never given any responsible post" can therefore remain puzzling. One might argue that Srila Prabhupada was talking about monarchical succession, while Indira Gandhi had been

operating within a democratic system; yet her appointment as prime minister in 1966 - and before that as President of the Indian National Congress in 1959 and Minister of Information and Broadcasting in 1964 - seem to indicate that political leadership by a woman was culturally acceptable (and politically viable) in twentieth century India. I recommend taking the expression "woman is never given any responsible post" as a generalization and not as a literal fact. (I find interesting that, although India was a democracy, there were elements of "dynastic succession" in Indira Gandhi's raise to power, as she was the daughter of Jawaharlal Nehru, the first prime minister of independent India.) On other occasions



Indira Gandhi with ISKCON devotees.

Srila Prabhupada did indicate that a woman could certainly assume a "responsible post":

Harikesa: In America they have women senators now.
Prabhupada: Huh?
Harikesa: Women senators, women are in charge of companies sometimes.
Indian man: No, in India there are two women. They are high commissioners of India to the foreign countries. [Indian ambassadors to other Commonwealth nations are known as "high commissioners."]
Prabhupada: No, that is possible. That it requires education.
(Morning Walk, Vrindavana, 10 Dec 1975)

Srila Prabhupada also approved of women assuming responsible administrative posts within ISKCON:

Mrs. Wax: Could a woman be a temple president?
Prabhupada: Yes, why not?
(Room Conversation, Chicago, 5 July 1975)

Visakha Devi Prabhu, a disciple of Srila Prabhupada since 1971, reports: "Prabhupada gave his female followers responsible service as heads of the pujari department and pujaris, preachers and book distributors, art department

heads and artists, headmistresses and teachers, proofreaders and other BBT staff, kitchen heads and cooks, and in a number of other areas. He based his appointments on their qualifications, not their sex." [78] Even more significantly, Srila Prabhupada also proclaimed that qualified women can function as initiating spiritual masters, in one sense the most "responsible post":

Prof. O'Connell: Is it possible, Swāmījī, for a woman to be a *guru* in the line of disciplic succession?
Prabhupāda: Yes. Jāhnavā devī was—Nityānanda's wife. She became . . . The qualification of *guru* is that he must be fully cognizant of the science of Kṛṣṇa. Then he or she can become *guru. Yei kṛṣṇa-tattva-vettā, sei guru haya* (Cc, *Madhya-lila* 8.128) . . . In our material world, is it any prohibition that woman cannot become professor? If she is qualified, she can become professor. What is the wrong there?
(Interview with Professors O'Connell, Motilal and Shivaram, Toronto, 18 June 1976)

In this topic, supporting Vaisnavis accepting disciples, Srila Prabhupada was purely representing centuries of Gaudiya-vaisnava tradition and practice. Besides the dozens of

[78] https://www.vaishnaviministryna.com/what-s-a-woman-to-do

examples of ladies serving as *diksa-gurus*, nobody among the Gaudiya *acaryas* ever spoke against the idea of women serving as initiating spiritual masters.

Women & Trustworthiness

Srila Prabhupada wrote: "Cāṇakya Paṇḍita, the great politician and moral instructor, said, *viśvāso naiva kartavyaḥ strīṣurāja-kuleṣu ca*: 'Never put your faith in a woman or a politician.'" (SB 8.9.9, purport) The statement may sound baffling: if Cāṇakya Paṇḍita was a politician and he said that we shouldn't trust politicians, should we really trust him or not? This apparent contradiction could perhaps be resolved by saying that the motivations and the message of politicians (especially if as cultured and principled as Cāṇakya Paṇḍita) can sometimes be trusted when they talk about *principles* of politics, but not when they are themselves politicking. Although Srila Prabhupada did quote Cāṇakya Paṇḍita's statement on women being untrustworthy, he also relativized and qualified it: "Cāṇakya Paṇḍita says, *viśvāso naiva kartavyaḥ strīṣu rāja-kuleṣu ca*: 'Never trust woman and politician.' He was a politician, and his wife was kidnapped. He had very bad experience of these two things, Cāṇakya Paṇḍita.

Therefore he gave this injunction . . . 'Never trust woman and politician.'" (Lecture on SB 5.6.2, Vrindavana, 24 Nov 1976) In other words, it seems that Cāṇakya's own "bad experience" had affected his views. Another relativization of the statement occurred when Srila Prabhupada restricted its application to "ordinary" women: "Cāṇakya Paṇḍita says, *viśvāsaṁ naiva kartavyaṁ strīṣu rāja-kuleṣu ca . . .* Never trust the politician and woman. Of course, when woman comes to Kṛṣṇa consciousness, that position is different. We are speaking of ordinary woman . . . Kṛṣṇa says [Bg 9.32]:

māṁ hi pārtha vyapāśritya
ye 'pi syuḥ pāpa-yonayaḥ
striyo vaiśyas tathā śūdras
te 'pi yānti paraṁ gatiḥ

Even . . . women, *śūdra* and *vaiśya*, they also can become fully Kṛṣṇa conscious by training. And they can also go back to home, back to Godhead, without any check. So when we study things from material point of view, these things are to be taken care. But when a man or woman becomes Kṛṣṇa conscious, he or she takes care of herself or himself." (Lecture on Bg 1.40, London, 28 July 1973)

This elucidation, of course, won't appease "ordinary" women; but at least it can mitigate the impact of the "never trust" quote by making it less universal and more circumstantial.

Trustworthiness is an individual trait, not an exclusively gender-based characteristic. Some men are untrustworthy; some women are trustworthy - and vice versa. Being trustworthy depends on qualities such as honesty, loyalty, sense control and good character; and not simply on one's plumbing. Yamuna Devi, who spent considerable time with Srila Prabhupada on various continents, recalls: “I was present on four occasions when Srila Prabhupada repeated the Chanakya adage, ‘Never trust a woman or a politician.’

Yamuna Devi with Srila Prabhupada

On each occasion Srila Prabhupada looked me in the eye to see my response. On the last occasion, in Bombay in 1973, he quoted the saying, heartily laughing in front of a small group of men. Then he said:

'What do you think, Yamuna?' Immediately I retorted: 'Of course it is true, Srila Prabhupada,' whereupon he became grave, looked at me with great feeling, and said, 'But you are not a woman; you are a Vaishnava.'"[79]

Srila Prabhupada believed that a Krishna conscious woman can take "care of herself"; and he demonstrated his trust by giving initiation to unmarried women and to women married to non-devotees:

African man: Śrīla Prabhupāda, since there is no distinction between man and woman—these are both designations—is it possible for a woman to become a brāhmaṇa? . . .

Prabhupāda: Woman is a *brāhmaṇa*'s wife. Then she is automatically a *brāhmaṇa*.

African man: Suppose she doesn't want to get married for the rest of her life, just wants to serve the Lord?

Prabhupāda: So in his spiritual position everyone is a *brāhmaṇa.*

Brahmānanda: But you give brahminical initiation to unmarried women.

[79] https://www.vaishnaviministryna.com/what-s-a-woman-to-do

Prabhupāda: Yes. But on spiritual point she is *brāhmaṇa*. On the spiritual platform there is no such distinction. (Morning Walk, Nairobi, 2 Nov 1975)

Srila Prabhupada's spiritual master, Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura, applied the same principle; he initiated married women even if their husbands were not initiated. He also initiated unmarried girls, expecting them to be able to maintain their spiritual practices even if they would later marry a non-devotee. Bhavatarini Devi, Srila Prabhupada's sister, was one example of a disciple of Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura who, despite being married to a drunkard and fish-eater, faithfully maintained her initiation standards. To initiate prospective disciples, of any gender, the guru needs to trust that they will loyally follow their vows. Our Vaisnava *acaryas* have shown their belief in the capacity of Vaisnavis to steadfastly continue on the devotional path even without the support of a practicing husband. Vaisnavis can remain self-reliant and spiritually autonomous even in adverse conditions. Gaudiya-vaisnava gurus, including Srila Prabhupada, consider Vaisnavis as trustworthy women.

The Internal Need for Improvement

An aspect the public scrutinizes when evaluating a religious group is how women are treated. I am sad to report that some portions of ISKCON are doing very poorly in this connection. This is not only important because the public is watching; improving our understanding of the role of women and our treatment of them is essential for the wellbeing of all our members, for our implementation of genuine *varnasrama* principles, and for the overall auspiciousness for our movement. The *Manu-samhita* teaches that ill-treating women generates all kinds of disasters: "A family where women remain unhappy due to misdeeds of their men is bound to be destroyed. And a family where women are always happy is bound to prosper forever." (*Manu-samhita* 3.57) If Srila Prabhupada's spiritual family must prosper, it needs to reform its treatment of the ladies.

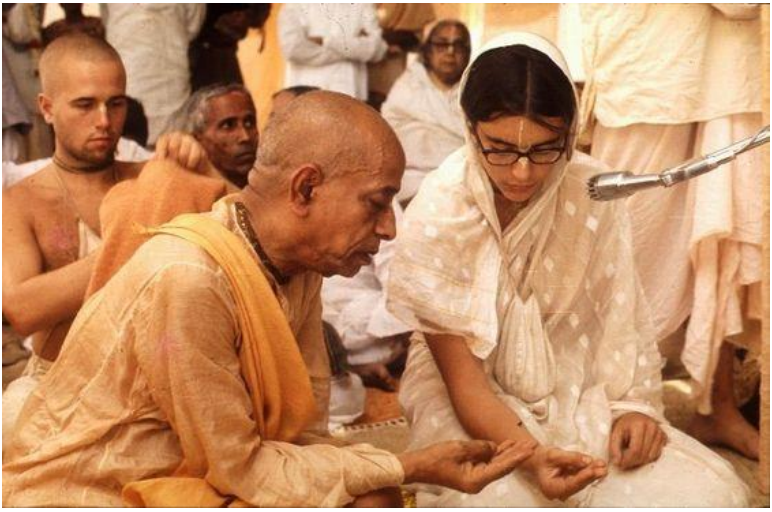
Srila Prabhupada may have said things that sound sexist and anti-women, but he treated them with great care and respect. Because many of our devotees do not have the

same mental and cultural development, we should be careful to distance ourselves from those remarks by Srila Prabhupada that appear stereotyping or condescending toward women - our juvenile macho members do not handle those statements very well (and "juvenile" may include immature people in their seventies...). Growing to embrace a more mature understanding and behavior is indispensable not only for safeguarding the status and reputation of the movement, but also for promoting psychological and social sanity within ISKCON. Only damaged individuals wish to join a movement that underestimates or oppresses women.

In what has been defined the "Golden Age" of ISKCON - the time in which every devotee personally knew Srila Prabhupada and he personally knew every devotee - generally the relations between the genders were more affable and congenial. At that time, approximately till 1970, Srila Prabhupada had a much closer personal connection with all devotees. In those years he was much more involved in his disciples' lives than in the later years, when the movement expanded dramatically and ISKCON membership swelled to thousands (some initiated disciples of Srila Prabhupada never met him in person). Around

1970, with the increase of *sannyasis* (often young, inexperienced, and hormonally vigorous men), the movement became more militant and chauvinistic. The feminine, softer aspects of ISKCON life drastically declined. Various leaders started seeing and depicting women as the enemy, as the embodiment of illusory fascinations, as sources of mundane attraction that needed to be neutralized and exorcised. A prominent leader suggested shipping all ISKCON women to Australia - presumably in the hope of the "out of sight, out of mind" effect. (He apparently didn't realize that, had his plan materialized, soon most men would have also bought a ticket to Sydney or Melbourne). Past and present misogynistic devotees, unripe renunciants and other struggling individuals - often men deprived of motherly affection in childhood - embraced and embrace the literal, unexamined versions of Srila Prabhupada's typecasts and generalizations of women, often creating a contemptuous and oppressive atmosphere for girls and women in our movement. This creates painful experiences for our women - which produces heavy social and karmic reactions. Bigoted attitudes also cause a huge loss of opportunities and a gigantic waste of potential, as women are discouraged from being the best they can. It also

triggers a perception of ISKCON as a community like the Taliban or the ISIS. Such atmosphere seriously discourages new prospective members - both women and men - from joining the movement. I truly hope, wish, and pray that future generations will do better.



Srila Prabhupada gives brahminical initiation to Visakha Devi. In the back, Bhavatarini Devi, Srila Prabhupada's sister (and Godsister).

Srila Prabhupada wrote: "Sometimes jealous persons criticize the Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement because it engages equally both boys and girls in distributing love of Godhead. Not knowing that boys and girls in countries like Europe and America mix very freely, these fools and

rascals criticize the boys and girls in Kṛṣṇa consciousness for intermingling. But these rascals should consider that one cannot suddenly change a community's social customs. However, since both the boys and girls are being trained to become preachers, those girls are not ordinary girls but are as good as their brothers who are preaching Kṛṣṇa consciousness." (Cc, *Adi-lila* 7.31-32, purport) Ironically and sadly, although Srila Prabhupada's criticism was directed toward outsiders, numerous ISKCON insiders have adopted the attitudes Srila Prabhupada denounced.

The "Rape Purport"

In the Fourth Canto of *Srimad-Bhagavatam*, Srila Prabhupada wrote a sentence that caused (and is causing) much confusion and condemnation. That paragraph generated (and is generating) virulent vilification of the Founder-*Acarya* not only as a sexist but even as a defender of rape. The accusations are totally unfounded, but the choice of words do appears regrettable and disastrous: "Although rape is not legally allowed, it is a fact that a woman likes a man who is very expert at rape." (SB 4.25.41, purport)

Rupa-Vilasa Prabhu writes in his article "Fourth Canto 'Rape' Controversy": "These few sentences have caused no little consternation among both devotees and nondevotees alike, since they appear to sanction what is considered a heinous and vicious crime. Taken out of context and without regard to the word's intended usage, it does appear to be a reprehensible sentiment. However, if the use of the word is analyzed in the context of the above verse and purport, the succeeding verse and purport, other lexical usages, as well as other of Srila Prabhupada's statements, it becomes clear that nothing heinous or vicious is being advocated."[80]

Let's talk about it. Let's start from how Srila Prabhupada clearly considered rape a criminal activity: "When a man's lusty desire is very strong, he commits, what is called, rape, and he becomes complicated in criminal activities." (Morning Walk, Philadelphia, 14 July 1975) Srila Prabhupada considered rape not only criminal but also animalistic: "That is the difference between the man and animal. Animal cannot control; man can control . . . A cat and dog or a cow or a bull—rape. As soon as there is a female, immediately rapes. So there is no punishment. But

[80] http://www.bbtedit.com/files/rapeRV.pdf

if you do that on the street, raping, immediately you will be criminal. So that is the difference." (Lecture on SB 1.2.15, Los Angeles, 18 Aug 1972) Srila Prabhupada empathized with victims of rape, with their intense pain: "Intoxicated man, he cannot recognize even his father, mother, or even his sister or mother . . . One father intoxicated—there are so many instances—raped the daughter. Daughter is crying, 'My dear father, I am, I am...' Who cares for that? Intoxicated." (Lecture on SB 1.15.22-23, Los Angeles, 2 Dec 1973) Clearly, that was his understanding of rape, that the victim suffers; she doesn't enjoy it: "There is cases of rape cases. The victims are women . . . In every rape case the sufferer, or the victim, is woman." (Conversation, Chicago, 9 July 1975) I personally heard from Malati Devi about a time she was in Srila Prabhupada's room; a letter arrived, informing His Divine Grace that a lady disciple had been raped in Trinidad. When he heard that, Srila Prabhupada shed tears. On another occasion, after saying how rape is "most dreadful," Srila Prabhupada launched on a detailed description of how to prevent any indiscretion among the genders and how to carefully protect women by cultural norms. We report the dialogue in some detail to show how strongly he encouraged the division of the sexes and

denounced loose interactions - what to speak of sexual violence: "Here the real attraction is the sex. The other statistics I was seeing is that all these hitchhike statistics is rape. Most dreadful . . . The lusty desire is so prominent that whenever they will get some opportunity. That's all. Therefore it is ordered that you should not remain alone even with your sister, with your daughter, with your mother—and what to speak of others. *Śāstra* says, *mātrā svasrā duhitrā vā nāviviktāsano bhavet* (SB 9.19.17): 'Don't keep yourself alone even with your mother or sister or daughter,' what to speak of others. This is prohibited. And those who have taken this *brāhmaṇa*, religious, for them to see even one woman and appreciate, 'Oh, she is very nice,' that is also subtle sex. Eight kinds of subtle sex. Therefore according to Vedic civilization, woman is allowed to dress herself very nicely only before the husband. On the street, they will not go out. They will not go out. Even they go out—covered. That is observed strictly by the Muhammadans . . . Nobody can see the bodily structure . . . Even my mother; my wife also . . . Going to next-door neighbor, so my mother used to go there . . . not walking; by . . . carriage . . . next door simply one step . . . there was palanquin going from this house to that house . . . Four men carrying the palanquin from here

to there . . . That was the situation, even our mother's time . . . My wife never gone in bus, tram. No . . . Nobody would see the face of woman. Veil. Who is going, nobody knows: 'Some women is there.' That is Oriental culture." (Conversation, Honolulu, 16 June 1975) For those familiar with Srila Prabhupada's profound sense of decency and morality, it would be absurd to suggest that he would condone something as sinful and barbaric as rape - rape as defined in the dictionary: "unlawful sexual activity and usually sexual intercourse carried out forcibly or under threat of injury against a person's will or with a person who is beneath a certain age or incapable of valid consent because of mental illness, mental deficiency, intoxication, unconsciousness, or deception." (Merriam-Webster) It's inconceivable that Srila Prabhupada, famous for his conservative sexual ethics and his worldwide promotion of "no illicit sex," would ever endorse rape, such a criminal and immoral act. It appears that Srila Prabhupada used the word *rape* with two different meanings: as a criminal sexual assault or as an aggressive sexual advance. His circumstantial, seemingly tolerant remarks on rape only apply to the second definition. *Wikipedia* confirms that the meaning of *rape* changed through time and the word still lacks a common definition: "In Medieval English law

the same term could refer to either kidnapping or rape in the modern sense of 'sexual violation'. The original meaning of 'carry off by force' is still found in some phrases, such as 'rape and pillage' . . . Rape is defined in most jurisdictions as sexual intercourse, or other forms of sexual penetration, committed by a perpetrator against a victim without their consent. The definition of rape is inconsistent between governmental health organizations, law enforcement, health providers, and legal professions. It has varied historically and culturally. Originally, rape had no sexual connotation and is still used in other contexts in English . . . Other definitions of rape have changed over time . . . Lack of consent is key to the definition of rape." Some forms of intercourse are defined *rape* by law; although they might not involve assault or force: "Sexual intercourse with a person below the age of consent . . . is referred to as statutory rape. In India, consensual sex given on the false promise of marriage constitutes rape." Also, what represents *consensual sex* is not always sharply defined: "Consent may be complicated by law, language, context, culture and sexual orientation. Studies have shown that men consistently perceive women's actions as more sexual than they intend. In addition, verbalized 'no' to sex may be interpreted as 'keep

trying', or even 'yes' by offenders." The best would be to prevent compromising circumstances and strictly adhere to the standard of no sex outside marriage, but sex between married partners also requires consent: "Marital rape, or spousal rape, is non-consensual sex in which the perpetrator is the victim's spouse. It is a form of partner rape, domestic violence, and sexual abuse. Once widely accepted or ignored by law, spousal rape is now denounced by international conventions and is increasingly criminalized."[81]

Srila Prabhupada condemns rape - sexual violation - as a great harassment of innocent women: "There was fight . . . afterward, if the other party is defeated, the victorious party makes some... so many aggressions, especially aggression of women. That is still current. Innocent women, they are very much harassed after the war by the victorious party. You know, the soldiers are given freedom to rape the women." (Lecture on Bg 1.36, London, 26 July 1973) Srila Prabhupada had witnessed such crimes during the despised British occupation: "The victorious party, they plunder the defeated party . . . the soldiers are given freedom even to rape the women . . . I have seen, in my

[81] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rape

childhood, that the British soldiers were let loose and they used to go to the village and they used to rape any village woman . . . the general, ordinary soldiers . . . will be allowed to go in the town and villages and capture any women and rape it. They're given. They're given wine and they are given flesh and facility for raping women." (Lecture on SB 7.6.29-7.7.9, Bombay, 15 March 1971) Obviously there is no indication whatsoever of Srila Prabhupada's condoning or legitimizing such brutality.

Srila Prabhupada looked at rape as a symptom of a hellish society: "If in the society the *brāhmaṇa* . . . and . . . Vaiṣṇava, is not there, then the whole society will spoil. They will indulge in this meat-eating and wine, drinking wine, and illicit sex. Then it will be hell, and it has already become. Whole world is full of hellish person. In a civilized country like America you cannot walk alone in the street at night. India is still honest. Any part of India, you can walk . . . In New York, especially in Brooklyn, or anywhere, you cannot walk alone. Is it not? Yes. Your life is at risk. That Central Park, nobody can walk there. I have heard from many women that they. rape. The Negroes, they capture and rape. Life is unsafe even in a civilized city like New York." (Morning Walk, Hyderabad, 20 April

1974) Srila Prabhupada is neither saying nor remotely implying that women enjoy being sexually assaulted in Central Park - or anywhere else. He describes such violent sex acts as signs of hellish life, perpetrated by hellish individuals. And, sadly, his remarks about India being safe appear antiquated nowadays, almost half a century later. I must clarify that although Srila Prabhupada colloquially oversimplifies and generalizes the assaulters as Black, 2019 FBI data reveals that among all US arrests for rape 69.8 percent involve Whites and only 26.7 percent entails Blacks. (Now, Whites being 76.3% of the US population and Blacks being only 13.4%, the rape arrests of Blacks are more than double than those of Whites - but still only a fraction of the total.)[82] Also, according to RAINN (*Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network*), the largest US anti-sexual violence organization, less than 20% of rapes are committed by strangers, while in 80.5% of cases the perpetrators know the victim. Confirming Srila Prabhupada "hellish" prognostication, RAINN reports: "Every 68 seconds, an American is sexually assaulted. And every 9 minutes, that victim is a child."[83]

[82] https://ucr.fbi.gov/crime-in-the-u.s/2019/crime-in-the-u.s.-2019/topic-pages/tables/table-43
[83] https://www.rainn.org

Beside the Fourth Canto purport, there is only one other reference in which Srila Prabhupada seems to relativize the seriousness of rape, or, rather, in which Srila Prabhupada refers to an incident in which it was debatable if it was a true case of rape or not. His comment appears during a morning stroll in Perth, Australia, and if we carefully look at the exchange, we see two elements: first, Srila Prabhupada stresses that the defendant, the alleged assailer, escaped conviction because of the argumentative skills of the "very intelligent" lawyer, who, "some way or other," "by hook and crook" made the victim disclose that she had felt some pleasure. Second and more importantly, Srila Prabhupada says that women, "they like sometimes" - the key word being "sometimes" - which doesn't minimize or erase his multiple condemnations of rape and doesn't invalidate his various acknowledgments of the suffering of the victims. In other words, in this informal exchange Srila Prabhupada seems to commingle: 1. sexual assault; 2. sexual consent accompanied by external feigning of disapproval: "They willingly. That is the psychology. Outwardly they show some displeasure, but inwardly they do not." The exchange is still problematic, although it appears to conflate two very distinct experiences. Let's look at it:

Prabhupāda: Everyone is misinterpret[ing]... They are making their own lusty desires fulfilled in the name of Bible, that's all. Everyone is doing like that. They are changing. Mass opinion is now homosex. They are passing abortion . . . For fulfillment of their lusty desires and greediness, they are bringing the authority of Bible, *Bhagavad-gītā*. This is going on in the name of religion.

Gaṇeśa: They swear on the Bible in the court. And I was reading in the paper the other day that now in England they have passed a law whereby a man cannot be convicted of rape if he honestly believes that the woman consented to be raped.

Prabhupāda: Eh? What is that? Woman?

Gaṇeśa: They said that the man cannot be convicted of rape if he honestly believes that the woman consented to his raping her.

Prabhupāda: Yes, that is law always. Rape means without consent, sex. Otherwise there is no rape. There was a rape case in Calcutta, and the lawyer was very intelligent. He some way or other made the woman admit, "Yes, I felt happiness." So he was released. "Here is consent." And that's a fact. Because after all, sex, rape or no rape, they will feel some pleasure. So the lawyer, by hook and crook, made the woman agree, "Yes, I felt some pleasure." "Now,

there is consent." So he was released. After all, it is an itching sensation. So either by force or by willingly, if there is itching, everyone feels relieved itching it. That's a psychology. It is not that the women do not like rape. They like sometimes. They willingly. That is the psychology. Outwardly they show some displeasure, but inwardly they do not. This is the psychology.
(Morning Walk, Perth, 11 May 1975)

One year later, in another conversation, Srila Prabhupada, makes a clear distinction between consensual union and rape, within the context of a theological analogy:
Prabhupāda: You cannot become God. That is not possible. But he's wrongly thinking.
Vipina: Why doesn't Kṛṣṇa protect us from that desire?

Prabhupāda: He's protecting. He says: "You rascal, don't desire. Surrender unto Me." But you are rascal, you do not do this.

Vipina: Why doesn't He save me from thinking like that?

Prabhupāda: That means you lose your independence.

Vipina: And no love.

Prabhupāda: That is force . . . In Bengali it is said: "If you catch one girl or boy, 'You love me, you love me, you love

me.'" Is it love? (laughter) "You love me, otherwise I will kill you." (laughter) Is that love? So Kṛṣṇa does not want to become a lover like that, on the point of revolver, "You love Me, otherwise I shall kill you." That is not love, that is threatening. Love is reciprocal, voluntary, good exchange of feeling, then there is love, not by force. That is rape. The... why one is called lover, another is called rape?
(Conversation, Washington DC, 8 July 1976)

Let's now focus directly on the famous "rape purport," starting by examining the *Bhagavatam* context: through the allegorical narration of King Purañjana, Narada Muni instructs King Prācīnabarhiṣat, a Vedic ruler entangled in mundane ritualistic performances (*karma-kāṇḍa*) and animal sacrifices: "Nārada Muni wanted to show King Prācīnabarhiṣat how one undergoes great troubles and miseries in order to engage in fruitive activity." (SB 4.15.9, purport) The story basically chronicles the failed attempt of the soul to find pleasure in this world - The word *purañ-jana* means “one who enjoys in a body.” After portraying the city of nine-gates - the physical body - Narada Muni illustrates the connection between the self, the soul, and its material intelligence, represented by an attractive

woman. Twenty-three verses describe the encounter between Purañjana and the unmarried lady, his becoming fascinated with her, his courtship, their flirtatious exchanges, her appreciation of his "aggressive mercy," and her accepting him as her husband. In the purports, Srila Prabhupada interweaves philosophical unpacking with socio-psychological observations about the interactions between the genders. For instance: "The woman, who represents intelligence, was searching after a husband. This indicates that intelligence cannot act without consciousness." (SB 4.25.21, purport) "Since every woman in this world wants her husband to be very influential, rich and powerful, Purañjana, to seduce the girl, introduced himself as such a personality." (SB 4.25.29, purport) As the metaphorical, flirty dialogue between Purañjana and the woman continues, sexual tension increases: "when Purañjana became so attracted and impatient to touch the girl and enjoy her, the girl also became attracted by his words and accepted his request by smiling. By this time she was certainly attracted by the King." (SB 4.25.32) In the purport Srila Prabhupada explains that women are indeed attracted to amorously assertive men: "By this incident we can understand that when a man is aggressive and begins to woo a woman, the woman becomes

attracted to the man." The conversation turns more explicit, with the woman seductively saying: "How can I expect to unite with others, who are neither conversant about sex nor capable of knowing how to enjoy life while living or after death?" (SB 4.25.32) Srila Prabhupada elaborates in the purport: "animals do not know how to actually enjoy sex life. In the human form of life, however, there is full knowledge of how to enjoy sex . . . There is even a science called *kāma-śāstra,* which is the science of sex." In this connection, in an 1883 English edition of *The Kama Sutra of Vatsyayana,*[84] we find directions on how men of particular social groups can woo girls from specific classes. The list of recommendations includes amusing the girl with "various games and diversions," offering exclusive gifts, etc. but also boasting about one's sexual prowess and fostering physical contact: "He . . . should also inform her of his great skill in the art of sexual enjoyment . . . When engaged with her in any game or sport he should intentionally hold her hand. He should practise upon her the various kinds of embraces . . . At parties and assemblies of his caste he should sit near her, and touch her under

[84] The dedication reads: "dedicated to that small portion of the British public which takes enlightened interest in studying the manners and customs of the olden East"

some pretence or other." The text, apparently in consideration of the testosterone-driven male nature, does advice the man to take the initiative with a degree of aggressivity. This appears required, as the girl is instructed to outwardly resist the boy's advances: "The girl herself should try to get alone with her beloved in some quiet place . . . But old authors say that although the girl loves the man ever so much, she should not offer herself, or make the first overtures, for a girl who does this loses her dignity, and is liable to be scorned and rejected. But when the man shows his wish to enjoy her, she should be favourable to him and should show no change in her demeanour when he embraces her, and should receive all the manifestations of his love as if she were ignorant of the state of his mind." After that stage, though, she should externally refuse to go along: "But when he tries to kiss her she should oppose him; when he begs to be allowed to have sexual intercourse with her she should let him touch her private parts only and with considerable difficulty; and though importuned by him, she should not yield herself up to him as if of her own accord, but should resists his attempts to have her. It is only, moreover, when she is certain that she is truly loved, and that her lover is indeed devoted to her, and will not change his mind, that

she should then give herself up to him, and persuade him to marry her quickly." (*Kama-sutra*, Part III, Ch. 3 & 4)[85] In other words, according to the traditional customs of certain social groups, such girls are expected to show resistance, even if internally they warmly welcome the forceful, romantic onslaughts of their lovers. This psycho-physical dance can produce equivocal situations that blur the line between the "recommended" vigorous attempts of the male for union and, on the other hand, sexual violence and non-consensual coitus. In intensely passionate moments the man may fail to distinguish between the woman's coquettish, pretentious refusal and her true, resolute rejection. But, even at the height of sexual arousal, the civilized man should always maintain some judiciousness and control: "Just like the example is given by Viśvanātha Cakravartī," Srila Prabhupada says, "that when a man kisses a woman and bites her, she becomes pleased. Is it not? Is it not a fact that that biting is pleasing? Is it pleasing? But sometimes it is pleasing. So one has to learn where to bite and when to... (chuckles) But if a rascal thinks that, 'Biting is pleasing. I shall bite always,' then he is a rascal." (Morning Walk, Hyderabad, 20 April 1974)

[85] https://www.gutenberg.org/files/27827/27827-h/27827-h.htm

Back to the *Bhagavatam*. After this brief foray exploration into *Kama-sutra* love-making directives it should be easier to digest Srila Prabhupada's statements on how women appreciate energic sexual advances. Purañjana's sweetheart herself declares: "O mighty-armed, who in this world will not be attracted by your arms, which are just like the bodies of serpents? Actually you relieve the distress of husbandless women like us by your attractive smile and your aggressive mercy." (SB 4.25.42) Srila Prabhupada basically restates the same in the purport: "When a husbandless woman is attacked by an aggressive man, she takes his action to be mercy. A woman is generally very much attracted by a man's long arms. A serpent's body is round, and it becomes narrower and thinner at the end. The beautiful arms of a man appear to a woman just like serpents, and she very much desires to be embraced by such arms." So, considering these psychological, cultural, and hormonal realities, the "rape purport" should not be interpreted as Srila Prabhupada condoning a criminal activity - one that he had consistently denounced and condemned - but as a fateful choice of words to describe reasonable sexual aggressivity. The purport should also not be construed to mean that women like to be raped - a traumatic experience Srila Prabhupada pitied and

sympathized with. We should also avoid taking the purport to mean that women are fond of rapists, a category they loathe and detest. Let's read from the "incriminated" purport again: "A man is always famous for his aggression toward a beautiful woman, and such aggression is sometimes considered rape. Although rape is not legally allowed, it is a fact that a woman likes a man who is very expert at rape." (SB 4.25.41, purport)

This is another occurrence that makes one wonder: what were the BBT editors thinking? Were they sleeping at the wheel, blissfully unaware of the terrible consequences of such a sentence? Or were they naively absorbed in indiscriminately worshiping whatever Srila Prabhupada would utter? Why (apparently) nobody red-flagged the statement as a no-no for publication? And why, after publication, in the years the purport was in circulation in Srila Prabhupada's presence, (apparently) nobody approached him requesting permission to revise the passage? A slight far-sightedness could have prevented heaps of pain. I have absolutely no doubt that if someone had told him about the hazardous nature of the phrase, Srila Prabhupada would have agreed to modify it. We may choose to eulogize the innocent faith of the devotees that,

while Srila Prabhupada was physically present, read the "rape purport" and perhaps felt a bit bewildered, but solved their perplexity by humbly thinking, "Srila Prabhupada knows best; I might not understand, but he is always right..." This may be an attitude appropriate for a surrendered follower, but it may also betray an insular or puerile mentality. We shouldn't just be concerned about our own faith in the Founder-*Acarya*; we should also worry about how the world sees him, his Bhaktivedanta purports and the movement that takes those purports as sacred references. The text had (and has) to be edited. As a *service* to the author. Keeping it "as it is" may represent a serious disservice to Srila Prabhupada and his mission.

Senior BBT editor Jayadvaita Maharaja (who did not work on this purport), explains in his article "Expert at rape": "Clearly, Srila Prabhupada does not intend to say that what women really want is, for example, to be mugged and violated in Central Park. When you look at the translation and purport for Text 42 and consider the two purports together, you can get a better understanding of Srila Prabhupada's point. In essence: The male wants to conquer, and the female wants to be conquered. A woman does not want to be sheepishly asked her hand by a

bashful, weak-kneed Milquetoast. She wants to be pursued and won, to be fought over by strong and eager suitors, to be 'swept off her feet.' In that sense, a man is attractive to a woman when he is bold, strong, valorous, assertive, aggressive, 'manly,' and so on . . . Of course, 'rape' carries with it images of guns, bruises, and brutal thugs–hardly what any woman hopes for. But the essential feature–a man who is strong and aggressive–is sexually attractive. The ultimate attractive male, of course, is Krishna Himself. He carried off Rukmini Devi, snatching her like a lion from the clutches of the jackal Sisupala. Krishna married Satya after defeating seven bulls. Krishna married Lakshmana by carrying her off at her *svayamvara* ceremony, 'in the same way that Garuda snatched the jar of nectar from the hands of the demigods.' And Krishna married sixteen thousand other wives after rescuing them from the demon Bhaumasura . . . Krishna is the real object of love for all living entities. As long as we continue in material consciousness, identifying with our material bodies, as male and female, and forgetting Krishna, we have to continue forever as the cheaters and the cheaters–the rapists and the raped–in this miserable material world."[86] A devotee named Tulsi Priya commented on the

[86] https://www.jswami.info/expert_at_rape/

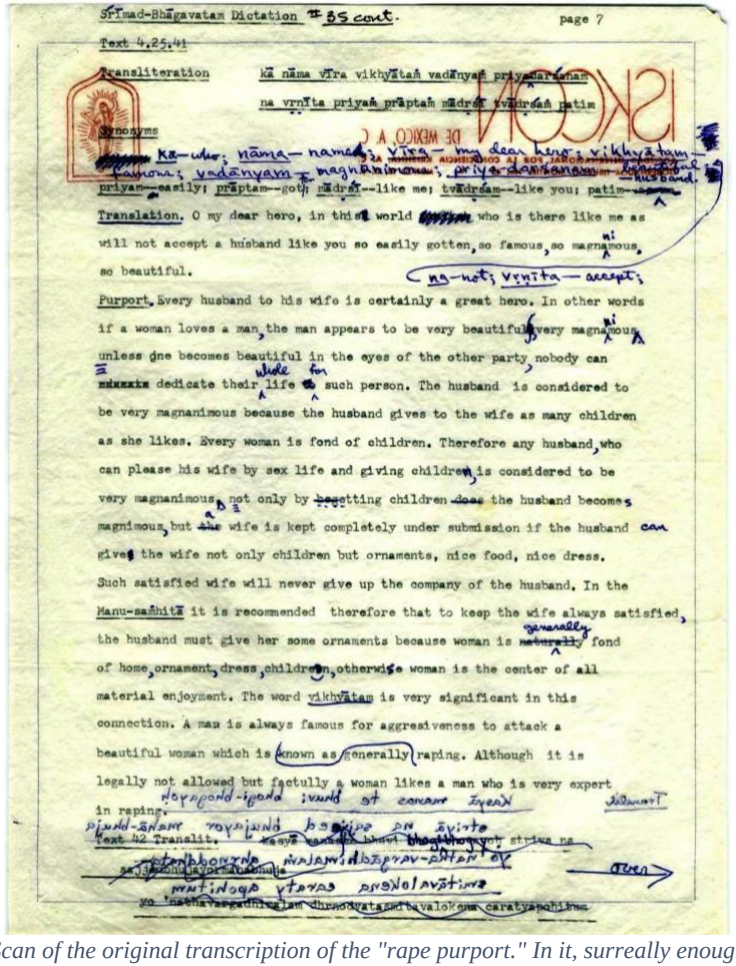
article: "Also, simple common sense would imply that if a woman likes a man who is 'expert at rape,' your average thug in Central Park or some dark alley is not what is being referred to. Expertise is obviously not required to commit rape in that sense."

Another angle of analysis involves studying the dissimilarities between the published version and the original transcription of what Srila Prabhupada's actually said. He would dictate the purports, which were then transcribed and edited. This is the original transcript (I am highlighting in bold some of the words omitted or changed in the printed version): "A man is always famous for **aggressiveness to attack** a beautiful woman **which is known as generally raping**. Although it is legally not allowed but factually a woman likes a man who is very expert in **raping**." The differences are not trivial. For instance, the word *aggressiveness* (more commonly rendered as *aggressivity*) is not the same as *aggression* - the published word. *Aggressivity* is a personal trait, while *aggression* is an act of physical violence. The dictionary defines *aggressiveness* as, "readiness to engage in daring or difficult activity" (Merriam-Webster), in other words, the boldness, the chutzpa to attempt a valiant action,

such as wooing a beautiful woman, an attempt from which weaker men would shy from, in fear of rejection and embarrassment. "People who are aggressive in their work or other activities behave in a forceful way because they are very eager to succeed." (Collins) The dictionary offers the following synonyms: *forceful, powerful, convincing, effective* - all words with mostly positive connotations; aggressive people have the energy, the drive to achieve their aims; in this case seducing an attractive member of the opposite sex. In contrast, *aggression* - the word published twice (although Srila Prabhupada didn't speak it) - has a negative flavor: "Aggression is violent and attacking behaviour." (Collins) The listed synonyms include *injury* and *assault*; terms connected with harming others (in the United States, an *assault* can be charged as either a misdemeanor or a felony). In legal parlance, *aggression*, is the crime of attacking a country without justification. So, the shift from *aggressiveness* to *aggression* made the message much heavier than intended; coloring it with a negativity absent in Srila Prabhupada's dictation. I can't be sure, but Srila Prabhupada choosing of *raping* (repeated twice) instead of the published *rape* (printed three times) appears to convey the older, softer meaning of the expression, as the *Online Etymology Dictionary*

describes: "late 14c., *rapen*, 'seize prey; abduct, take and carry off by force' . . . probably from Latin *rapere* 'seize, carry off by force, abduct' . . . The older senses of the English word became obsolete. The surviving meaning 'to abduct (a woman), ravish;' also 'seduce (a man)' is clearly by early 15c." [87] In contemporary American English dictionaries we don't find any longer the archaic definitions of *rape*, but in British English dictionaries - with which Srila Prabhupada would have been more familiar - we do find such alternative definitions. For example, the *Chambers English Dictionary*, included: "rapine, plunder, seizure (obsolete) . . . to seize and carry off (obsolete) . . . to ravish or transport, as with delight (obsolete) . . . ravishing, delighting (obsolete)." Since the *Bhagavatam* is not describing 'rape' in the contemporary sense, and since Srila Prabhupada consistently displayed the highest ethical standards, intellectual integrity impels us to consider the above definitions as fit candidates. Rupa-Vilasa Prabhu offers an example of such optional meanings: "In the eighteenth century, the English poet Alexander Pope wrote a satirical poem called *The Rape of*

[87] https://www.etymonline.com/search?q=rape


Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam Dictation #35 cont. page 7

Text 4.25.41

Transliteration kā nāma vīra vikhyātaṁ vadānyaṁ priyadarśanam
na vṛṇīta priyaṁ prāptaṁ mādṛśī tvādṛśaṁ patim

Synonyms

Kā—who; nāma—named; vīra—my dear hero; vikhyātam—famous; vadānyam—magnanimous; priya-darśanam—beautiful; priyam—easily; prāptam—got; mādṛśī—like me; tvādṛśam—like you; patim—husband.

Translation. O my dear hero, in this world who is there like me as will not accept a husband like you so easily gotten, so famous, so magnanimous, so beautiful.

Purport. Every husband to his wife is certainly a great hero. In other words if a woman loves a man, the man appears to be very beautiful, very magnanimous, unless one becomes beautiful in the eyes of the other party, nobody can dedicate their life such person. The husband is considered to be very magnanimous because the husband gives to the wife as many children as she likes. Every woman is fond of children. Therefore any husband, who can please his wife by sex life and giving children, is considered to be very magnanimous, not only by begetting children does the husband becomes magnimous, but the wife is kept completely under submission if the husband can gives the wife not only children but ornaments, nice food, nice dress. Such satisfied wife will never give up the company of the husband. In the Manu-saṁhitā it is recommended therefore that to keep the wife always satisfied, the husband must give her some ornaments because woman is naturally generally fond of home, ornament, dress, children, otherwise woman is the center of all material enjoyment. The word vikhyātam is very significant in this connection. A man is always famous for aggressiveness to attack a beautiful woman which is known as generally raping. Although it is legally not allowed but factully a woman likes a man who is very expert in raping.

Text 42 Translit.

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Scan of the original transcription of the "rape purport." In it, surreally enough, Srila Prabhupada never pronounces the word "rape" as such.

the Lock, poking fun at a controversy in which a lover cut a lock of the heroine's hair without her permission. In this

sense, to 'seize and carry off' would be the appropriate understanding of 'rape,' whereas the usage in this part of the *Srimad-Bhagavatam* suggests another usage: 'to ravish ... with delight.' It is true that these usages are unusual, but they are certainly not unknown in the English language, even if considered obsolete in contemporary usage." Rupa-Vilasa Prabhu concludes his article "Fourth Canto 'Rape' Controversy": "Ordinarily these meanings are little used, or even considered obsolete, but since the sexual activity described in *Srimad-Bhagavatam* is consensual, we are bound to find a meaning that makes sense and that portrays Srila Prabhupada for what we know him to be: an absolutely moral person who could never advocate violence on an innocent and defenseless woman . . . Certainly violent acts perpetrated on women without their consent is nowhere glorified in the Vedas or in Srila Prabhupada's teachings."[88] The overpowering conveyed by the word *raping* appears intended as more psychological than physical; more emotional than muscular. Yes, the man is larger and stronger; he is vigorous and insistent; but the woman, despite her natural hesitation and trepidation, enjoys the masculine onslaught. After all, the *Bhagavatam* vignette describes a

[88] http://www.bbtedit.com/files/rapeRV.pdf

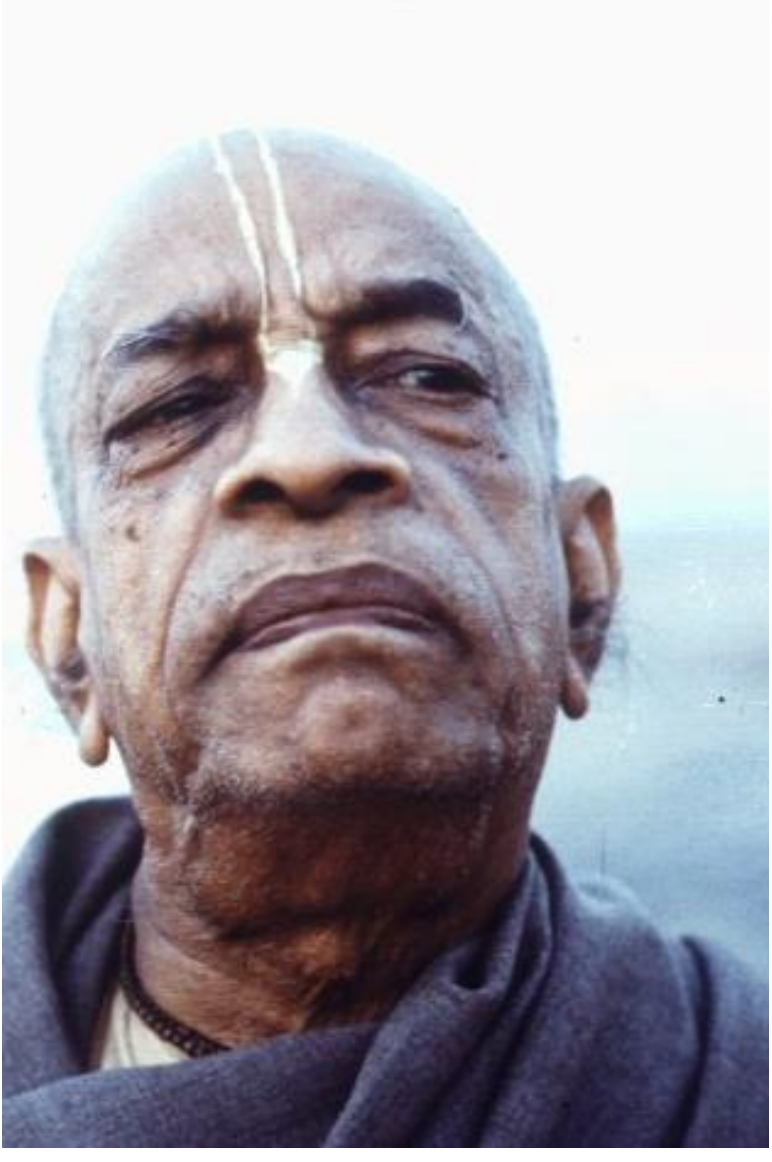
civilized exchange between Purañjana and his future wife, a sensually charged but urbane effort at seduction. There is no violence, no abuse. No rape. The scene doesn't involve sexual assault. It's therefore puzzling that an expression as serious as *raping* was employed. In fact, all Srila Prabhupada seems to wish to say is basically what he says, less contentiously and less ambiguously, in the next purport: "When a husbandless woman is attacked by an aggressive man, she takes his action to be mercy." (SB 4.25.42, purport) In other words, she likes the attention; she is attracted by the self-confidence of the male; and she appreciates the manliness of the attempt - when there is no harm or injury; when there is not literal rape; and when the man is "expert"; not just a barbarous brute.

Narada Muni instructs King Prācīnabarhi through the allegory of Purañjana.

Vaisnava exegesis (and common sense as well) insists that when the direct, literal meaning of a sentence (*mukhya-vṛtti*) is meaningless, we must seek an indirect, secondary meaning (*lakṣaṇā-vṛtti*). Srila Prabhupada offers the classic example of the village *on* the Ganges: "Interpretation is needed when we cannot understand something. When the meaning is not clear then somebody speaks that meaning can be like this, other person speaks that the meaning can be like that. Interpretation is needed when the matter is not understandable. Like *sastra* says: *gaṅgāyāṁ ghoṣa-pālli*, that on the Ganges there is a village called Ghoshpara. Here you can say that the Ganga is water, there how can a village, Ghoshpara, can come? Then we have to interpret that *gaṅgāyāṁ* means on the bank of Ganges, on the side of Ganges." (Lecture - translated from Bengali - Calcutta, 12 March 1973) (For a more technical and detailed explanation of the interpretational rule, see SB 10.87.1, purport) Similarly, in this case the apparent literal meaning that women like rapists is absurd - it's plainly and demonstrably not true - and we are compelled to find an alternative reading that makes sense.

Srila Prabhupada is a rational person; he has described *rape* as "criminal" and "most dreadful"; he had described the

crying of a rape victim; he himself cried when he heard that one of his disciples had been raped; how could he possibly suggest that women like rapists? No, there must be a better, sounder explanation. And the logical conclusion is that he simply meant that women generally like men who are assertive in their romantic advances.



5. Srila Prabhupada, the Needed Revolutionary

The fundamental idea needed to understand Srila Prabhupada's social views (almost indigestible for the contemporary public) is that there are differences between holy and unholy life; between virtue and sin; between elevating and degrading actions; between civilized and animalistic behavior; between right and wrong; between light and darkness; between divine and demoniac. We need to accept that his statements on the roles of the genders come from the highest authority on social matters (or on any matter): Vedic wisdom. Yes, I am the first to say that some of the things he said are not to be repeated verbatim. Yes, I do strongly encourage ISKCON to distance itself from some of the expressions Srila Prabhupada used in informal and private talks (or even in published books). But those are details, cumbersome but fringe minutiae. His core social message is wholesome and healthy; his vision advanced; his logic unassailable. We

must remember that Srila Prabhupada wasn't a literalist or a fundamentalist when it came to marginal aspects. His basic social recommendations, although radical sounding, are feasible and beneficial for individuals and society. Let's also remember that he made generous concessions based on time, place and circumstances. Also, he said different things in different circumstances - and to grasp his overall message we must reconcile those apparently contradictory positions. So, some work is needed to gain a coherent, balanced picture of his suggested policies, and it may take a few generations to see them properly implemented in ISKCON; but even the longest journey starts with a single step.

In diametrical contrast with Srila Prabhupada's teachings, modern moral relativism promotes a view of existence with no clear ethical parameters and boundaries. The atheistic outlook takes the universe as an unintelligible accident, the result of an inexplicable explosion; the emergence of life as a coincidence; the consortium of the living as an indecipherable conglomerate of transient organisms possessing no ultimate aim besides pleasuring their nervous endings - and breeding, endlessly breeding. Darwin, Marx, Freud, Kinsey and other materialistic

theoreticians have predisposed humanity to a godless, religion-less, value-less and ultimately directionless existence and lifestyle. Unquenchable greed for profit drives many private and state projects, doggedly depleting natural resources and devastating the environment. Instincts are supreme. Curbing bodily appetites is for repressed, antiquated morons. Carnal indulgence and sensual extravagance constitute the only true *dharma*. Sex - in all its kaleidoscopic forms - is the essence of life; our authentic destiny; the real need of the self. In this ideological portrayal those familiar with the *Bhagavad-gita* recognize the asuric mentality Krishna describes in Chapter Sixteen: "O son of Pṛthā, in this world there are two kinds of created beings. One is called divine and the other demoniac . . . Those who are demoniac do not know what is to be done and what is not to be done. Neither cleanliness nor proper behavior nor truth is found in them. They say that this world is unreal, with no foundation, no God in control. They say it is produced of sex desire and has no cause other than lust. Following such conclusions, the demoniac, who are lost to themselves and who have no intelligence, engage in unbeneficial, horrible works meant to destroy the world. Taking shelter of insatiable lust and absorbed in the conceit of pride and false prestige,

the demoniac, thus illusioned, are always sworn to unclean work, attracted by the impermanent. They believe that to gratify the senses is the prime necessity of human civilization. Thus until the end of life their anxiety is immeasurable." (Bg 16.6-11) Sadly, as a species we are rapidly gliding toward fulfilling this dark vision. Every year we kill between 40 and 50-millions of our unborn children (even taking the lower estimate, we abort 76 babies every minute). We terminate one in four pregnancies. Every year we slaughter 77 billion animals, including some 300 million cows. Every year we kill some 100 million tons of fish (some 2.7 trillion individual fish caught from the wild, plus billions that are farmed).

Every year we cut down 15 billion trees (just for our paper goods we destroy each year 4.1 million hectares of forest; an area the size of the Netherlands). We purchased more than 500-millions copies of the Harry Potter books. Also more than 500-millions are those among us with genital herpes. We also engage in human trafficking, mostly of girls and women, keeping some 40-millions of our brothers and sisters in slavery. Accurate data on rape is difficult to obtain, as most victims don't report it, but, roughly, one every three of our women will be sexually harassed in her lifetime. 35% of all our internet downloads are related to porn. Every year an estimated 376-millions of us get infected with one of these four sexually transmitted diseases: chlamydia, gonorrhea, syphilis and trichomoniasis.

Every year, we kill each other more than 400,000 times (we commit more than 1,000 homicides each day - and this without counting when we kill each other in wars, civil wars, and genocides). We have stored 13,890 nuclear warheads - 3,750 of them active - some of which more than 3,000 times as powerful as the bomb dropped on Hiroshima. Without waiting for nuclear detonations, every year 2.8-millions among us kill themselves by alcohol abuse. Every year 8-millions among us kill themselves by smoking. Every year more than 750,000 of us kill themselves by drug abuse (35-millions of us suffer from drug use disorders, but only 1 in 7 receive treatment). Approximately 280-millions of us suffer from depression, and every year 700,000 of us commit suicide (the fourth leading cause of death in 15 to 29-year-olds). More than 200-millions among us are unemployed. More than 800-millions of us go hungry; but we manage to waste one third of all the food we produce; some 1.3 billion tons every year. Every year at least 2.8-millions of us die due to being overweight or obese. Should I go on? Nah. I am tired. If you like, you can search by yourself the data on other crimes and on other preventable physical and mental illnesses; or data on addiction to gambling, to shopping, to video games, to plastic surgery (yes, plastic surgery).

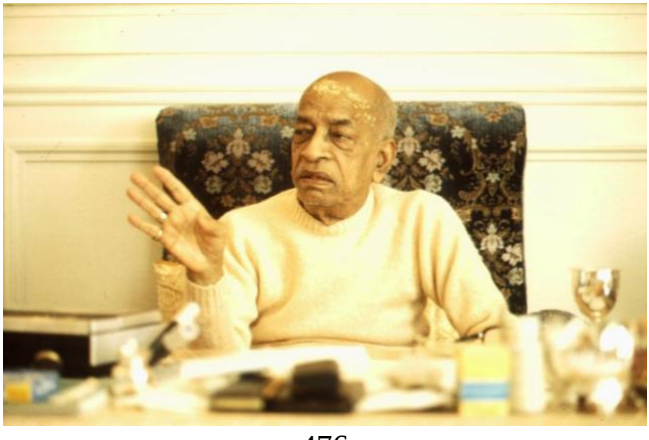
You can look up studies on how our technology ensnares us and disrupts our lives, physically and psychologically. You can find out how many people don't wash their hands after going to the toilet; or read studies on how much money we spend on the highly cultured activity of watching sports, or on cosmetics, or on pets, or on military expenses (we kill each other more effectively with specialized, advanced machinery). Should I get into how we messed up the planet? Nah; too depressing. Or should I tell you how, despite our scientists telling us that we are on the brink of devastation due to rising temperatures, we are still shillyshallying, incapable to take the decisive steps to avoid a planetary catastrophe? Too disappointing. Conventional religious groups are often unable to contain the degradation, their own leaders addicted to animal killing, intoxication and other debasing habits (for instance, 57% of Christian pastors in the US admitted having struggled with porn). Both Pope Francis and the Dalai Lama eat meat, contributing to worsening both the greenhouse effect and humanity's karmic burden. You may legitimately conclude that, as a species, we are violent, self-destructive, spectacularly stupid, and prone to all sorts of addictions. You may deduce that we are cosmically alienated, fundamentally misaligned, and

radically disoriented. You may get the impression that we are a bunch of "fools and rascals," but let me share about our dazzling social successes. Worldwide, 45% of all our pregnancies are unwanted (what kind of troubled beings are we attracting? What heavy psychic baggage are these souls carrying?). Worldwide, some 15% of our children are born out of wedlock. In dozens of countries the majority of our children are born out of wedlock (how damaged would they be by growing up in single-parent homes?). Since 1960, our global divorce rate has increased more than 250%. Today we marry less and we divorce more (increasingly, we can't stand each other for long). We desperately seek love, affection, connection, but find it so hard to maintain stable relationships (although our best-selling book genre is *romance*, with one-third of all mass market fiction books being romance novels). There is something fundamentally wrong with us; like the famous analogy of the equation that, with a mistaken calculation at the beginning, quickly goes completely off. If we created this crazy, bloody mess, we should at least humbly recognize that we need help. We should actively seek solutions in socio-philosophical paradigms different than the ones that created such abysmal results. But no, our silliness and moral weakness make us stubborn and

arrogant. Concluding His teachings on "The Divine and Demoniac Natures," Lord Krishna warns that godless viewpoints and sinful behavior don't simply spoil one's present lifetime: "Attaining repeated birth amongst the species of demoniac life, O son of Kuntī, such persons can never approach Me. Gradually they sink down to the most abominable type of existence. There are three gates leading to this hell – lust, anger and greed. Every sane man should give these up, for they lead to the degradation of the soul. The man who has escaped these three gates of hell, O son of Kuntī, performs acts conducive to self-realization and thus gradually attains the supreme destination. He who discards scriptural injunctions and acts according to his own whims attains neither perfection, nor happiness, nor the supreme destination. One should therefore understand what is duty and what is not duty by the regulations of the scriptures. Knowing such rules and regulations, one should act so that he may gradually be elevated." (Bg 16.20-24)

While the planet proceeded in its nose-diving trajectory, something unusual and unexpected happened. Enter Srila Prabhupada, a physically minute but fiery preacher from Bengal, the fearless voice of the most ancient, revealed

tradition. He blasts and lambasts human follies and failures, labeling contemporary society, even before leaving India, a "hell of pandemonium." (SB 1.5.36, purport) After reaching the American shores, the music doesn't change. This time he has direct experience of the descending spiral of Western (and Eastern) civilization. "There is derangement of the social order in the present-day world. Why? There is no head. They are all rascals. I frankly say it . . . Therefore Kṛṣṇa consciousness is the most important subject of the present-day society." As he spoke these words in San Francisco, in 1968, his movement might have been small, but he was talking with the authority of the emissary of God; the representative of the Supreme Father of all beings, not as the leader of a minuscule Hindu sect.



Srila Prabhupada knew how to fix society; if only the leaders would listen to him: "The responsible men who are leading the society, the president, or the secretaries, or the mayor, they should have intelligence to understand. But if we approach... the other day when I was coming to your country, I met in Japan, Tokyo, one chief secretary of the governor. I wanted to explain to him that 'You just cooperate with this movement.' He said: 'Oh, we are secular. We cannot cooperate with any religious movement.' Just see. He's one of the chief secretaries of the governor, and he's such a fool. He is taking this movement as religious movement. Just like they have got so many sentimental religions. Oh, it is not sentimental. It is the necessity of the society that a class of men should be Kṛṣṇa conscious. Otherwise the society is doomed. It is going to hell." Srila Prabhupada clearly saw the debasement and disbandment of humanity due to the disqualifications of the leaders: "They have no brain. So brainless persons, rascals, are on the head of government, how there can be peace? How you can expect peace in the dog's society? The dogs are by nature howling—*'how, how, how'*—as soon as he sees another dog . . . if you turn human society into dog society, into cat society, into tiger society... Tiger is very powerful. He can kill many other

animals. Does it mean it is very important animal? No. It has no use in the society. Undoubtedly it is very powerful. It has got the good weapons to fight, and it can kill many. These are not qualifications for good men or good society. Why you are afraid of a tiger? Why you are afraid of a monkey? So we are not meant to manufacture a society of monkeys or tigers or asses and mules. The asses, they work very hard. Do you mean to say a society of ass will derive any benefit? No. We want human society. Human society. Otherwise, what is the use of becoming human being?" Srila Prabhupada was aware of the huge hurdles facing his mission; but he saw it as the only alternative to society remaining headless and continuing its downward arc into wretchedness: "So the situation is so difficult that... it is very difficult to push on this movement, but still we have to do it . . . a section of person must be head of the society . . . But if the leg takes the part of working like head, how it can work? . . . Therefore, when the *śūdras* or the leg take the part of the head, working like head, it is all disorder. It is all disorder." Srila Prabhupada clearly articulated the solution that people, even religious leaders, couldn't see, due to their poor fund of knowledge: reconnecting with Lord Krishna, our Supreme Friend and Benefactor; introducing in society His teachings and the

practice of loving service to Him: "Kṛṣṇa attachment can be developed. Just like before my coming here, there was no movement like this, Kṛṣṇa consciousness, but you are developing . . . Kṛṣṇa was not born in your country . . . To Kṛṣṇa you are not a foreigner. He claims everybody as His son. We make Him foreigner. This is our foolishness. Kṛṣṇa says, *sarva-yoniṣu kaunteya* (Bg 14.4), 'My dear Arjuna, there are many different forms in different species of life, undoubtedly, but I am their father.' Just see how Kṛṣṇa is universal. He is claiming not only the human society, but even animal society, even the bird society, beast society, aquatic society, botany society, everyone. Everyone He says that, 'I am the father.' So how Kṛṣṇa can be foreign to you? No." Srila Prabhupada brought the message of true brotherhood, transcending the parochial confines of speciesism: "Just think in terms of the human community. Human community. So this... why human community? Living being community. If you make this world as belonging to the human society, that is defective. It belongs to everyone. It belongs to the trees' community; it belongs to the beast community. They have got right to live. Why should you cut the trees? Why should you send the bulls to the slaughterhouse? This is injustice." Srila Prabhupada was lucidly, clinically aware that irresponsible,

abusive behavior toward other species and other humans creates an unpleasant string of karmic consequences: "And how you can meet justice by doing yourself injustice? Because you have no Kṛṣṇa consciousness. You do not know that Kṛṣṇa is our original father and we are all sons. The tree is my brother, the ant is my brother, the bull is my brother, the American is my brother, the Indian is my brother, the Chinese my brother. This is universal." Without this theological and philosophical understanding, without Krishna, vague, sentimental notions of unity remain as futile banalities: "Therefore you have to develop Kṛṣṇa consciousness before you talk of this nonsense universal brotherhood and this United Nations and all this nonsense. These are useless talks if you have no idea how to think of universal brotherhood or United Nations. Useless. Therefore they are talking for years, years. Still, they are the same fools. Don't you see? The United Nation, they have got their headquarter here. Simply talking nonsense. That's all. That is their business. So unless there is full-fledged Kṛṣṇa consciousness, there cannot be any improvement of the world situation." Ultimately, the solution is one and one only, reconnecting with and surrendering to Krishna; and Srila Prabhupada was crystal clear about this simple secret for uplifting society - one

individual at a time: "You have to develop your attachment for Kṛṣṇa . . . Just as we have got a few students here, sincere students, both boys and [girls]. . . they are developing . . . Kṛṣṇa conscious development, is very natural, because Kṛṣṇa is not a thing belonging to a particular type of religion or sect or society. Kṛṣṇa claims that, 'I belong to everyone.' Therefore, originally, you are all connected with Kṛṣṇa. Simply you have forgotten." (Lecture on Bg 7.1, San Francisco, 17 March 1968) He might sound judgmental, even hostile, with his scorching evaluations, his blistering attacks, his uncompromising condemnations; but Srila Prabhupada was on that ship for more than a month to come and help; and he worked day and night to offer us the solution. He was the true representative of our best friend, and therefore he was the true well-wisher of the world.

"Old Wisdom" & Gender Roles: The "Counter-Revolution"

I am going to do something different here. I will intertwine excerpts from a discussion by Srila Prabhupada on Auguste Comte with arguments by Scott Yenor,

professor of political science at Boise State University, quoting from his 2021 article "Sexual Counter-Revolution."[89] In it, Yenor denounces contemporary so-called "progressive" attitudes towards gender roles, pointing out that certain theories on women's independence have eroded the family institution and increased unhappiness for everyone - men, women and children. Both Srila Prabhupada's and Yenor's views may appear radical and reactionary to a large portion of contemporary readers (and in fact Yenor has been hotly contested and is considered a provocateur), but what they both say makes a lot of sense socially, anthropologically, psychologically, culturally, statistically and spiritually. The aim of a stable marital situation should be to facilitate focusing on the goal of life. After all, there is nothing truly stable in this world - everything fluctuates in impermanence - but against

Prof. Scott Yenor

[89] https://www.firstthings.com/article/2021/11/sexual-counter-revolution

this ephemeral, slippery backdrop humans need some degree of mental stability and social sanity to elevate themselves spiritually. A structured, harmonious, amicable relationship between the genders, centered on marriage, is therefore essential: "*Vivāha-yajña,* the marriage ceremony, is meant to regulate the human mind so that it may become peaceful for spiritual advancement." (Bg 18.5, purport) For marriages to work, though, our attitudes need to realign with what Yenor calls "Old Wisdom."

OK, let's go; Srila Prabhupada: "That is natural distinction between man and woman, so how it can be changed? Woman is meant for certain activities and man is meant for certain activities. So how this can be changed? Artificially if you change it, it cannot be changed. Then, just like woman becomes pregnant, man does not become pregnant. How it will be changed?"

Scott Yenor: "We need a counterrevolution that works for men and women, guiding natural differences toward expressions that are conducive to male-female cooperation and mutual support . . . Old Wisdom . . . made realistic assumptions about men, women, and sexual desire. Men desire more sex than women do, but moral expectations

once supported female modesty and sustained women's efforts to communicate the need for commitment before consummation by confining sex to marriage . . . Sex within the purview of enduring relations went with the grain of women's nature. Men benefited, too. They learned to subordinate sex within enduring relations . . . [which] pointed them away from juvenile preoccupations with sex."

Marriage helps men grow into responsible, reliable and productive adults. It even improves their health. According to the *Population Reference Bureau* (PRB): "Studies over the years have found that marriage confers some health advantages that married men enjoy over their never-married, widowed, and divorced counterparts." A study showed that "married men had a 46 percent lower rate of dying from cardiovascular disease than unmarried men . . . Married men are more likely to receive regular checkups and medical care, maintain healthy diets, exercise, and enjoy higher standards of living. In addition, married men benefit from lower levels of stress and fewer stress-related diseases. They also receive better care during times of illness. Overall, marriage appears to improve the

lifestyle of men and stabilizes their lives. Contrary to this, never-married, divorced, and widowed men are more likely to drink excessively, engage in dangerous behavior, and smoke. Furthermore, the psychological advantages of marriage include reduced risk of depression, lower incidence of isolation, and easier access to social interaction."[90] Of course, for those rare souls who can psychologically and spiritually afford it, a lifelong, pure *brahmacari* lifestyle might be even better than marriage; but for the rest of us marriage seems to be the best deal. Science Daily reports, specifically on US men: "research shows there is a 'marriage premium' for men that includes:

• A financial return that includes higher earnings, more assets and more job stability. Married men make about $16,000 more than their single peers with otherwise similar backgrounds . . .

• Longer lives. Men who get and stay married live almost 10 years longer than their unmarried peers. Also, young married men are about twice as happy: 43 percent of married men report they are 'very happy' with life,

[90] https://www.prb.org/resources/marriage-benefits-mens-health/

compared to 20 percent of single men and 24 percent of cohabiting men."[91] The study concludes that these benefits are "a direct benefit of marriage itself, and not simply a benefit of the fact that happier, healthier, and wealthier men are more likely to get married in the first place." So, marriage not only serves to protect women; it protects men as well (from themselves).

Srila Prabhupada: "When woman, when she is misguided, she becomes dangerous . . . they should be given protection by men. In childhood the protection is from the father, in youthhood the protection is from the husband, and in old age the protection is from the grown-up sons. So they should never be given independence."

Scott Yenor: "Second-wave feminists idealized 'the independent woman' . . . The independent woman does not need a man. She thinks her life incomplete if she does not undertake 'serious,' 'creative' work outside the home . . . a version of feminist ideology that was billed as moderate . . . ruthlessly disparaged mothers and wives who dedicated themselves to homemaking . . . The independent woman is also sexually adventurous, not

[91] https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2017/02/170207135943.htm

'frozen' or awaiting male advances . . . career ambitions demand the delay in marriage, which in turn requires a loosening of sexual mores so that our natural desires for sexual union can be satisfied . . . abortion and contraception guarantee freedom for the independent woman because they sever the tie between sex and procreation."

Above, Srila Prabhupada says that "woman, when she is misguided, she becomes dangerous." A woman that kills her baby in the womb is certainly "dangerous."

Srila Prabhupada: "They should be given protection, and their natural love for father or for husband or for children, then that propensity will grow very smoothly, and that will establish the relationship with woman and man very happy, and both of them will be able to execute their real function, spiritual life, by cooperation. The woman is known as his better half, so if she looks after the comfort of the man, a man is working and he is looking after the comfort, then both will be satisfied, and their spiritual life will progress."

There is a *science and an art of marital satisfaction* and part of Srila Prabhupada's mission is to teach that. To reach the ideal state we need to seriously revise our approach to education. In the long run, only the training Srila Prabhupada recommended, *guru-kula*, can produce peaceful men and women. Otherwise lasting marriages will continue to remain a chimera, a fantasy, largely a matter of chance - like a lottery (or a Russian roulette). And, by the way, broken marriages cancel the potential health benefits of marriage; according to the same PRB article quoted above: "The death rate and risks of medical problems such as hypertension, heart attacks, and strokes increase for men who are divorced or deal with difficult family relationships . . . divorce increases the incidence of suicide in men." Professor Yenor muses: "Perhaps legislators should impose a 'sin tax' on divorce, just as we tax other socially harmful behaviors." Srila Prabhupada would presumably support this proposal: "The divorce is artificial." he said, "The husband and wife, the combination, that cannot be cut off. So one should tolerate these things. If there is some misunderstanding, they should not go to the court for divorce. They should tolerate. These are some of the rules for spiritual

advancement." (Lecture on Bg 6.32-40, New York, 16 Sept 1966) More on this later.

Scott Yenor: "Today's sexual constitution, abetted by easy access to contraception and abortion, disconnects female sexual desire from marriage . . . Sexual difference persists amid these changes . . . Women have and want fewer sexual partners than men do. Women are much less satisfied with the hookup culture, since they are more likely to think sex and commitment should go together. Many women justly complain that it is hard to find a good man who will commit these days, but the new sexual constitution justifies sex apart from marriage and commitment. Feminism has changed women profoundly, but in ways not always consistent with their happiness. And it has changed men as well. With sex detached from commitment, men have less incentive to grow up. Their adolescence extends for a decade or more beyond physical maturation . . . Old Wisdom recognizes that male sexual desire disconnected from female demands for an emotional bond leads to indulgent excess."

Srila Prabhupada: "Man is meant for hard working, and woman is meant for homely comfort, love. So both of

them, if they are situated in their respective duties under proper training, then this combination of man and woman will help both of them to make progress in spiritual life . . . Generally, women are interested in comfortable home life."

Scott Yenor: "[Old Wisdom] used to value an education that pointed girls to motherhood and homemaking (among other things). It rewarded sexual modesty and chastity. Both of these ideas are now subverted and stigmatized . . . No human being is truly independent: The new woman merely depends on different things than did women of earlier generations. She depends on credentials to set her on a career path. She depends on her workplace, [etc.]." This reminds me of a wry observation Srila Prabhupada once made: "In India, when we were children, I saw one advertisement by the Remington typewriter machine company that, 'This machine has given emancipation to the woman class, because they have found some job for typewriting.' In this way they were advertising. But actually does it mean that because there are so many typewriting machine discovered, the women are emancipated? Rather, they have become dependent. Instead of being dependent at home, they have to go and

to become a secretary of a third-class person, and unless he gives job, his [her] life is in precarious condition. So is that emancipation? But it was advertised as emancipation." (Lecture on SB 7.9.11-13, Hawaii, 24 March 1969)

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"I'm delighted - and my boss is pleased"
5 MORE REASONS WHY
Remington KMC's Assure You lowest net typing costs
REMINGTON
Quiet DeLuxe KMC
MAKERS ALSO OF REMINGTON KMC
NOISELESS AND PORTABLE TYPEWRITERS
Remington Rand
THE FIRST NAME IN TYPEWRITERS

Not the same advertisement Srila Prabhupada saw as a child, but the same brand of typewriter and a similar subtext: women should get a job outside the home and strive to please the boss - a peculiar definition of "freedom."

Of course, for many millions of women, staying at home is not a viable option; they have to work outside; but it's a fact that this doesn't necessarily improve the quality of their life; it also exposes them to workplace sexual harassment. A 2020 World Bank blog reported: "By October 2017, women were fed up. Following the exposure of widespread sexual abuse allegations in the entertainment industry, an outpouring of voices shouting #MeToo finally broke the cycle of powerlessness, of suffering in silence. The #MeToo movement gave women, not only in Hollywood, but everywhere around the world, the courage to speak out against their abusers. For the first time, the shameful magnitude of this phenomenon was impossible to sweep under the rug. We realized that an extraordinary number of women experience sexual harassment in the workplace. It affects women in every country and across all socioeconomic levels. In the United States, for example, 60% of women reported being sexually harassed at work. In the European Union, 55% of women declared having been sexually harassed at least once, and 75% of women in a professional capacity or in top management jobs experienced sexual harassment in their lifetime." As per this writing, more than a third of all the world's countries don't have any laws prohibiting

sexual harassment at work. "The world began to see not only how society has failed to protect women, but also where governments have failed to protect their citizens."[92] We humans, especially the males, are a sorry bunch of promiscuous, philandering folks. Srila Prabhupada didn't expect this horny horde to remain strictly celibate. He was idealistic but not utopistic.

Srila Prabhupada: "So woman, sex, there is sex, sexual necessity and the bodily demand. So woman not only give the sex pleasure to the man, but woman should prepare good foodstuff also for the man. The man is working very hard. When he comes home, if the wife supplies him good foodstuff and nice comfort and sex, then the home becomes very happy. That is practical experience. So after hard working, when man comes home, if he finds out good foodstuff and nicely satisfied by eating, and then the woman gives satisfaction by sex, then both of them remain fully satisfied, and then they can improve their real business, spiritual understanding." According to the Science Daily article quoted above, "the many benefits that accrue from having a spouse" include: "Better sex lives

[92] https://blogs.worldbank.org/developmenttalk/sexual-harassment-serious-business

compared to both single and cohabiting men. According to data from the *National Health and Social Life Survey*, 51 percent of married men reported they were extremely emotionally satisfied with sex, compared to 39 percent of cohabiting men and 36 percent of single men." Srila Prabhupada recognized that sex plays a central role in the central portion of life of most humans, but he strongly discouraged sex outside marriage, adultery, masturbation... all forms of irresponsible sex.

Scott Yenor: "Sexual liberationists want a society 'beyond repression.' Boundaries must give way to enlightened, expressive sexuality until 'repression' vanishes and people are free to pursue sex as they wish . . . New taboos stigmatize as 'haters' those who perpetuate traditional sexual mores . . . Monogamy is ridiculed, called oppressive, and replaced with polyamory . . . Liberalized sexual mores disrupt the male-female dance. Stable marriage becomes a luxury good. Family life frays. Both intimate relations and domestic life become dysfunctional. The only alternative is counterrevolution . . . Old Wisdom recognizes that male sexual desire disconnected from female demands for an emotional bond leads to indulgent excess . . . the connections between sex, procreation,

marriage, and parental responsibility need to be rebuilt. Prohibiting abortion is an important step in this direction. Renewing cultural stigmas concerning contraception is another step."

To obtain stable marriages both men and women should accept to sacrifice some of their lower instincts, animal drives and flights of fancy. The man, for instance, should refrain from hunting for new sexual partners; the woman, as an example, should abandon artificial, self-defeating notions of independence. Modern "civilization" is dominated by the mode passion, which urges towards mirages of marvelous pleasures but ultimately produces pain and frustration. Our supreme friend, Lord Krishna, explains: "That happiness which is derived from contact of the senses with their objects and which appears like nectar at first but poison at the end is said to be of the nature of passion." (Bg 18.38) A life of *dharma* promotes emotional and social stability while protecting from superfluous distractions and whimsical cravings: "Husband must be very responsible to take care of the wife, and wife must be very chaste to serve the husband. Then family life is all right." (Morning Walk, Los Angeles, 27 June 1975) It's praiseworthy for a man to dutifully and steadfastly care for

his wife; for a woman it's glorious to remain chaste and faithful to her husband. As a special perk, she also gains mystical rewards: "As a man must follow great personalities like Brahmā and Nārada, a woman must follow the path of such ideal women as Sītā, Mandodarī and Draupadī. By staying chaste and faithful to her husband, a woman enriches herself with supernatural power." (SB 9.10.27, purport)

Scott Yenor: "Women were protected when they devoted themselves to motherhood and minding the home. Society expected husbands to provide for their wives and children . . . Put crudely, the old regime fostered magnanimity in men and endurance in women. The man's tendency to wander was countered by the expectation that he would serve honorably as head of his household. A woman's desire for social recognition was joined to her genius for relationships, as she basked in the achievements of her husband and children, made possible by her management of the household. Marriage might not answer every human longing, but it tutored sexual differences to the benefit of both men and women."

This last point is essential: we can't expect that any material relation (even if *dharmic*) will provide us with

unending oceans of ecstatic bliss. That's obtainable only in Krishna-*prema* and on the Vaikuntha planets. The function of regulated, legitimate interactions in this world, such as marriage, is to stabilize the mind and the senses, prevent karmic disasters, and provide a platform for further personal development. Such social institutions are not meant to generate unlimited happiness in and by themselves.

Srila Prabhupada: "So a woman, either as daughter, as wife or mother, remains subordinate and gets knowledge from the man, either from the father or the husband or son. Then that life is elevated. We find also in the conjugal life of Lord Śiva and Pārvatī, in the Purāṇas we see always Pārvatī is questioning and Lord Śiva is answering. In this way woman is elevated, and the comforts given by the woman, comforts of the tongue, of the belly, and the genital, in this way, cooperative life, both of them becomes advanced in spiritual life . . . Maintaining her comfortably, that is the duty of the man . . . in the Vedic conception the wife is considered as *dharma-patnī*, religious wife. Means wife helps the husband in the matter of his religious life. That is found in, still in Hindu family: the man is worshiping the Deity and the woman is helping

about the paraphernalia Deity worship, helping the husband so that he can immediately come into the Deity room and begin worshiping comfortably."

Scott Yenor: "changes in the . . . cultural norms of marital life have had profound effects. The code of the gentleman makes sense in times of outward female weakness and apparent male strength. At such times, men defer to and serve women as a way of respecting their dependent status as wives and mothers. Today, by contrast, the demand that men be gentlemen has little connection to social reality . . . In this atmosphere, male traits of aggression, self-assertion, and emotional absence are often exaggerated because untempered. No one is happy in this situation. Women ask where the good men have gone, and men are less capable of bearing responsibilities or even knowing what to do with their lives. The old sexual constitution shaped men and women in countless ways. It enforced strictures against pornography, polygamy, and prostitution . . . The new sexual constitution has changed all of this, almost always for the worse, for it produces, on balance, a great deal more unhappiness. The ways in which the new sexual constitution has weakened marriage, broken families, removed commitment as a requirement for sex,

and eliminated many of the fruitful checks that men placed on women and women placed on men are major reasons why many of the young are heavily medicated . . . We need to celebrate enduring, fruitful marriages, and we should honor parents who have raised children to responsible adulthood."

Srila Prabhupada: "So woman should always be engaged to assist the man in every respect in his religious life, in his social life, in his family life. That is real benefit of conjugal life. But if the woman does not agree with the man, and the man treats the woman as his servant, that is not good. The man should give the woman all protection and the woman should give all service to the man. That is ideal life, family life, conceived in the Vedic way of life." It might sound repulsive to dogmatic liberal partisans, but what Srila Prabhupada is suggesting is a "workable patriarchy" - to borrow an expression from Professor Yenor.

Scott Yenor: "we need a new gender ideology, one that restores a workable patriarchy . . . Feminists portray patriarchy as oppressive. But anyone who sees the world before 1960 as merely and simply harmful to women is a

dishonest enemy of mankind. The decline of the old constitution has led to many miserable women and purposeless men. We need a counterrevolution that works for men and women, guiding natural differences toward expressions that are conducive to male-female cooperation and mutual support . . . The rolling revolution has overturned every aspect of gender roles, marriage, and family that our great-grandparents took for granted. It seems unstoppable. But this is to misjudge history. The sexual revolution was born in the imaginations of those who raged against what they perceived as inhumane moral prohibitions and stultifying social expectations. Now that their revolution has remade our world, we can see that it ruthlessly reorders female socialization to accord with the desires of elite women, leaves men poorly formed, undermines marital stability, damages children . . . and immiserates men and women alike. A counterrevolution must destroy this new constitution. The cause is righteous and our indignation just."

With these pugnacious words, Scott Yenor concludes his article; an article I believe Srila Prabhupada would appreciate (an article that contains other interesting insights, besides what I extracted). I shared their points

side by side to show that despite the difference in style, the dissimilarity in culture, and a time gap of half a century, many of their ideas are essentially the same. They both identify the same degrading forces, and they both promote similar principles. The parallels in their views and in their recommendations reveal that: 1. Srila Prabhupada isn't alone in detecting the sorry state of social affairs; 2. certain contemporary intellectuals share Srila Prabhupada overall approach to gender roles; 3. dialogue and concurrence on social issues is possible with sane, insightful individuals. As Srila Prabhupada's followers, we should be instrumental in the radical re-orientation of social norms, as he envisioned. In this effort we can find valuable allies everywhere among virtuous thinkers and reasonable conservatives.

Time, Place & Circumstances

In the previous section I focused on Srila Prabhupada the "Vedic traditionalist," the promoter of a "workable patriarchy"; but I would be remiss if I didn't emphasize his great flexibility, his outstanding "modernity" - his capacity and willingness to adapt his core message to changing circumstances. I would be remiss not to mention the

variety of his instructions or the multiplicity of practical arrangements he sanctions. His style of communication is often categorical; his words may sound definitive and unnegotiable; but in countless cases he modifies, mollifies, and even switches his stance, always looking for what's feasible and beneficial. He focuses on principles, and he is always willing to jettison social details that are not conducive to the final goal. He readily drops the minutiae of traditional customs if they can hamper the growth of *bhakti*. He is fluid and non-formulaic. Srila Prabhupada writes: "The Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement is not stereotyped or stagnant." (Cc, *Adi-lila* 7.28, purport) He may speak favorably about a certain cultural practice, but later he dissuades his disciples from implementing it, if he thinks that they are not ready or that the conditions are not ripe.

More than One Wife? Maybe or Maybe Not

As an example of Srila Prabhupada's flexibility, at times he endorsed polygamy: "If the women outnumber the men, some men can accept more than one wife." (Cc, *Madhya-*

lila, 7.128, purport) but at other times he thoroughly discouraged it, to the point of banning the practice in ISKCON: "I have received your letter of 1/24/73 concerning polygamy and feel that this policy must be strictly prohibited within our society. If it is not it shall only cause chaos, as what was possible under the system of pure Vedic Culture is impossible at the present time." (Letter to Karandhara, 10 Feb 1973) To truly grasp Srila Prabhupada's stand on gender issues, it's crucial to understand his reasoning, as expressed here: something may be "Vedic," but it may produce a terrible outcome if applied in unfavorable conditions. On the same topic and with the same logic, four days later he wrote to another leader: "After conferring with my various GBC representatives I have concluded that polygamy must be strictly prohibited in our society. Although it is a Vedic institution still there are so many legal implications. Neither are many of our men fixed up enough to tend for more than one wife." (Letter to Rupanuga, 14 Feb 1973) So, was he for or against polygamy? He accepted the idea as an option, but only if the necessary conditions were in place. Otherwise, as we can see, he rejected it. Of course, just his having mentioned polygamy as a *possibility* may condemn Srila Prabhupada as an incorrigible sexist in the

eyes of rabid, radical feminists. But his idea was to protect women and create peace in society. He publicly and officially explained his thought-process in a *Caitanya-caritamrita* purport: "The social structure allowing a man to marry more than one wife can be supported in this way. Generally in every society the female population is greater in number than the male population. Therefore if it is a principle in the society that all girls should be married, unless polygamy is allowed it will not be possible. If all the girls are not married there is a good chance of adultery, and a society in which adultery is allowed cannot be very peaceful or pure. In our Kṛṣṇa consciousness society we have restricted illicit sex. The practical difficulty is to find a husband for each and every girl. We are therefore in favor of polygamy, provided, of course, that the husband is able to maintain more than one wife." (Cc, *Adi-lila*, 14.58, purport) This might sound horrendous to Western fundamentalists, but his stand was neither fanatical nor inflexible. In the broader perspective, his analysis is reasonable, even cogent. For instance, look at Nepal, the country with the highest percentage of female population: 54.5% of the total. For every 54.5 women there are only 45.5 men. Sticking to monogamy would mean sentencing 9 out of every 100 women to remain husbandless. That's

almost one and half million (1,500,000) Nepali women doomed to stay single. Pertinent Nepali legislation appears contradictory and confusing; the criminal code outlaws polygamy, whereas according to the civil code a couple is considered married if they have a baby - even if the husband was already married with someone else. In fact, despite the official ban, polygamy in Nepal is on the rise. Wouldn't be easier to just allow it, with the proper safeguards, as a demographically sound policy? (Interestingly, Nepalis also practice fraternal polyandry, two or more brothers marrying the same wife. That is, even more women left without husband...)

Although Srila Prabhupada banned polygamy in ISKCON, in his books he vehemently defended the principle of marrying more than one wife as an honorable option - certainly more respectable than employing young ladies in taking off their clothes in front of strangers in strip clubs and other decadent forums: "People have become so degraded in this age that on the one hand they restrict polygamy and on the other hand they hunt for women in so many ways. Many business concerns publicly advertise that topless girls are available in this club or in that shop. Thus women have become instruments of sense

enjoyment in modern society . . . Marriage means taking complete charge of a woman and living peacefully without debauchery. At the present moment, however, debauchery is unrestricted. Nonetheless, society makes a law that one should not marry more than one wife. This is typical of a demoniac society." (SB 4.26.6, purport) In the United States 3,752 strip clubs operate legally, but polygamy is illegal in all 50 states (however in 2020 the state of Utah changed the law, reducing polygamy to the status of a traffic ticket). Would you prefer to have your daughter working as a stripper or would you rather see her married to a principled, caring husband that she is sharing with another lawfully wedded co-wife? What would be better for your daughter's long-term happiness and wellbeing, for her moral and emotional status? Lap dancing (or worse) for hundreds of lecherous strangers? Or living as a rightful wife and mother in a dignified polygynist family? Running a strip-tease joint with, say, ten strippers, is totally legal. Responsibly maintaining two wives is a crime. Go figure. Nonetheless, we are witnessing how Americans increasingly take polygamy as acceptable. According to Gallup polls, in 2006 only 5% said it was morally acceptable; by 2015 it was 16% and in 2020 it reached 20% - a fourfold increase in 15 years. What will happen in the

next few decades? Which cultural trends will prevail? I don't know; but I hope that open-minded, well-informed people would eventually come to appreciate Srila Prabhupada's sensible and adaptable viewpoint on the subject.

Without understanding the multiplicity, the multidimensionality of his approaches, it would be tempting to label Srila Prabhupada as a sexist and discard his teachings in toto. For many, even a *whiff* of sexism would be enough to dismiss him, refusing him a fair hearing. If you are his follower, you need to understand the *radioactivity* of some of his words. If you don't identify as his follower, you may want to give him the benefit of the doubt. He came to teach that we are not the body; we are neither men nor women. We are eternal selves *inside* these fleshy tabernacles. There are differences between the genders - anatomical, physiological, and psychological differences - and, in the proper circumstances, the "Vedic" approach is the one offering the best chances at spiritual emancipation. I put "Vedic" within quotation marks because what's *Vedic* can be misinterpreted and interpolated in thousands of ways. Vedic norms can be misunderstood and misapplied. To successfully implement

a traditional Vedic custom, we need the necessary conditions - the cultural, legal, social, psychological, economic and spiritual prerequisites. Some can be created by hard work but trying artificially to be "Vedic" without considering time, place and circumstances can create disasters.

Early Marriage? Maybe or Maybe Not

Srila Prabhupada carefully considered the situation before recommending a Vedic practice or an Indian tradition. For instance, often Srila Prabhupada extolled the benefits of early marriage, especially for girls (he sometimes called it "child marriage"; a monstrosity to modern ears): "A young man is hankering after young woman . . . a young woman is hankering after a young man . . . Therefore, according to Vedic system, before the hankering becomes madly and one becomes spoiled by sex indulgence, he should be married. This is the psychology. A certain age—twelve, thirteen years, woman, and fifteen, sixteen years, man—they become very, very much sexually hankering . . . the young girl and young boy should be married so that unity

will endure. It will never break. There will be no more divorce. But when the hankering is exploited, then the whole life is spoiled." (Lecture on SB 7.9.53, Vrindavana, 8 April 1976) The idea is to create a strong bond between the boy and the girl "so that unity will endure"; so that they won't split up later in life. The intention is holy; the intended result is preventing promiscuity and its nefarious consequences. It's a different social blueprint; a sane alternative to the widespread failures to protect the morality of the youths and to preserve marital wholesomeness. It's a different conception of the role of women. Who can say, a priori, that it is wrong? Unless one is deluded by false propaganda and blind to the disintegration of modern society, one should at least listen with an open mind. It's a different view, even of womanly beauty: "Generally a woman becomes more beautiful when, after an early marriage, she gives birth to a child. To give birth to a child is the natural function of a woman, and therefore a woman becomes more and more beautiful as she gives birth to one child after another." (SB 4.24.12, purport) Many contemporary women would be horrified at the thought of having "one child after another." They may take it as something like the curse of Sisyphus, condemned to push a boulder uphill again and again, only

to see it rolling down again and again, and having to push it up again and again. They may think they have many more important things to do than nurturing human beings with affection of care; things more momentous than giving their love to children, helping them to grow as healthy, balanced, religious and emotionally adjusted adults. Do they imagine that they will be happier in the rat race of the modern economy, endlessly struggling in the fiercely competitive battle for wealth and power? Studies indicate that three out of four US working women with children at home desire the flexibility to spend more time with them. Early marriage (when feasible and when properly implemented) can prevent the strain, the stress, the struggle of joining the job market - and can avoid children growing up imbalanced, without the much-needed motherly love. Now, if the calling of a woman is to have a career, she is entitled to that choice. If she wishes to remain unmarried, that's her prerogative. We are not talking about absolutisms or draconian impositions here. In fact, Srila Prabhupada personally encouraged women to be active outside the home as teachers, priests (*pujaris*), book salespersons, etc. But if we consider the macro social dynamics, what Srila Prabhupada suggests as a general policy makes a lot of sense in the long run; and the

principles worked for millennia in plenty of civilizations. Modern people may think themselves happier, smarter, and freer, but the current state of human society doesn't corroborate their assumptions. Srila Prabhupada often spoke about the advantages of early marriage, but he also said that he wasn't trying to introduce the system in the West "Still, in India . . . in villages . . . Oh, they must get their girl, I mean to say, daughter, married before fifteen years. Otherwise, it will be a social scandal . . . of course, we cannot introduce that system in your country. It is not possible." (Lecture on SB 5.5.2, Boston, 28 April 1969) And when a disciple asked about a possible match of a 12-year-old girl with a 19-year-old boy, Srila Prabhupada discouraged it:

Rādhā-vallabha: He is nineteen years old, and . . . he made arrangement with another devotee to marry her daughter at a later date. She's only twelve. So I've told him not to do anything until I spoke to you . . .
Prabhupāda: There is no objection nineteen-years-old boy and twelve-years girl, it is very good combination, but the culture is so bad that after few days they will separate.
Rādhā-vallabha: Yes. That's the actual problem.
Prabhupāda: If they stick to have one husband and one wife, it is very good . . . The difficulty is nobody remains

as wife, nobody remains husband. It is very dangerous. That is against Vedic . . .

Rādhā-vallabha: So he wanted to know that...

Prabhupāda: Knowing or no knowing, they'll not do it even. So what is the use of consulting me? They'll break. They'll promise and they'll break. How you can make them standardized? They will break.

Rādhā-vallabha: They have to be responsible people.

Prabhupāda: They'll never become. That is my experience. So what is the use of consulting me? They'll never become. Almost impossible. They'll not keep standardized . . . What is the use of consulting? They'll promise and they'll break . . . Otherwise there is no objection. I married; my wife was eleven years old . . .

Rādhā-vallabha: But you were responsible.

Prabhupāda: Everyone in India responsible. That is Indian culture still . . . although a girl is married before puberty, she is not allowed to go to the husband until she has attained puberty . . . Then the husband and wife live together.

(Room Conversation, Mayapur, 27 Feb 1977)

Later, with the 2006 *Prohibition of Child Marriage Act*, India fixed the minimum legal age for marriage at 18 for women and at 21 for men. I am sure that after that Srila

Prabhupada would have been even more careful with early marriages.

In Mayapur, during a morning walk with his top leaders, Srila Prabhupada shares about his own experience of early marriage. He points out that ISKCON's primary function is purely spiritual, with promoting social norms being a distant second. I also find interesting how Tamala Krishna Maharaja expresses how Americans would react to Srila Prabhupada's descriptions of young girls' marriages:

Hṛdayānanda: How old were you when you got married?

Prabhupāda: I was student, so we were living separately. When she was thirteen years old, after puberty, then she was at... But there are many mothers still—the difference between the child, first child, and mother, twelve years. There are many mothers. At twelve years they gave birth to a child, especially in Bengal.

Tamāla Kṛṣṇa: In America that is considered very horrible.

Hṛdayānanda: Why?

Tamāla Kṛṣṇa: Catastrophe.

Prabhupāda: All my sisters were married within twelve years. My second sister, she became twelve years, and I heard my mother become so disturbed: "Oh, this girl is not being married. I shall commit suicide." (laughter)

Tamāla Kṛṣṇa: At twelve!

Prabhupāda: Twelve years. And she was given to a boy, my brother-in-law, for the second marriage. Means that my brother-in-law lost his first wife, and still, he was twenty-one years old. My sister was twelve years old and brother-in-law was twenty-one. In the *śāstra*... I do not know exactly what is that *śāstra*, but they say that if the girl before marriage has menstruation, then the father has to eat that menstrual liquid. Means it is, mean, very strict. And if the father is not living, then the elder brother has to eat . . . The girl must be married. That is it. It is called *dāya, kanyā-dāya* . . . *Dāya* means legally inheritance. That is called *dāya*. Just like your father's money you get automatically. So similarly, *kanyā-dāya* means to get the girl married is a *dāya*. You cannot refuse it. It is incumbent; you must do it.

Tamāla Kṛṣṇa: So many of our... the girls in our Society, they have reached that age, but they are not getting married.

Prabhupāda: No, your society is different. Now it is here also.

Tamāla Kṛṣṇa: I mean in ISKCON, in our Society.

Prabhupāda: No, ISKCON is not going to be social

reformer, but as far as possible, we can help. Our main business is how to make everyone Kṛṣṇa conscious. That is our business. We cannot take up, but if possible, we can take up all the system of *varṇāśrama*.

Tamāla Kṛṣṇa: If *varṇāśrama* is neglected, then how can there be proper functioning of society?

Prabhupāda: No. If the society chants Hare Kṛṣṇa seriously, then it is all right. Never mind whatever is done. It doesn't matter. *Pāpī tāpī jata chilo, hari-nāme uddhārilo*. This is the power of *hari-saṅkīrtana*. If one is absorbed in Kṛṣṇa consciousness, so all benefit is there. So long in the bodily concept of life, we require this *varṇāśrama-dharma*. Otherwise there is no necessity . . . The *varṇāśrama-dharma* is a good help undoubtedly, but it is not important for Kṛṣṇa consciousness. Otherwise how could I start this movement in the Western country? There was no *varṇāśrama-dharma*. But that did not hamper my movement. Now people are surprised: "How these people have become such great devotees." So it was not based on *varṇāśrama-dharma*. No. Because the whole movement is spiritual. It starts from the spiritual platform, *ahaṁ brahmāsmi. Jīvera svarūpa haya nitya-kṛṣṇa-dāsa* (Cc, *Madhya-lila* 20.108). *Samāśritā ye pada-pallava-plavaṁ mahat-padaṁ puṇya-yaśo murāreḥ, bhavāmbudhir vatsa-*

padaṁ param (SB 10.14.58). Now just like here is a gap. So you can go by the bridge, and if you can jump over, that is also going. That is also going. So to become Kṛṣṇa conscious means to jump over to the spiritual platform immediately. And this *varṇāśrama-dharma*, *sannyāsa, varṇa-tyāga*, *karma-tyāga*, these are different steps only. But if you become Kṛṣṇa conscious seriously, then you jump over all these steps; you go immediately. That lift and the staircase. By staircase you go step by step; by lift you can go immediately, faster.

Hṛdayānanda: Even some of these women, they're not married but they are serving Kṛṣṇa.

Prabhupāda: Yes . . . If he takes Kṛṣṇa very seriously, then everything is possible. No impediment. *Ahaituky apratihatā*. Kṛṣṇa... Devotional service is so strong that it cannot be checked by any material impediments. The *smārtas*, they are thinking like that, "How these *mlecchas* and *yavanas* can become a *brāhmaṇa*?" But they do not know that by Kṛṣṇa consciousness one can jump over. *Māyām etāṁ taranti te. Daivī hy eṣā guṇamayī mama māyā duratyayā* (Bg 7.14). *Māyā* is very strong. Therefore there are gradual process. *Varṇāśrama-dharma*, *karma-tyāga*, this, that, so many things, pious activities, rituals. But this is the process, step by step, to cross over *māyā*. But Kṛṣṇa

said, *māṁ eva ye prapadyante māyāṁ etāṁ taranti te*. Anyone who surrenders to Kṛṣṇa sincerely, immediately he crosses over.

(Morning Walk, Mayapur, 9 Feb 1976)

I chose to quote extensively from this exchange because it shows Srila Prabhupada examining side by side the social and the spiritual. Clearly, he takes all social affairs as relative - significant, but relative and unessential. He said many times that early marriage - in the proper conditions - has its advantages, but promoting it wasn't a priority for him, even within ISKCON. In fact, early marriages make more sense when the young girl would join an extended family, especially one living on a spacious agricultural estate. All day she would be engaged by the mother-in-law and by other senior ladies of the house. She would take care of her children, receiving constant support and company. Nowadays, with nuclear families, the young girl may have to stay alone at home all day, in a cramped apartment within an impersonal megalopolis... not a truly favorable situation. And so, although the principle of early marriage is noble, its application is often not viable; and Srila Prabhupada fully recognized that. But a casual web surfer encountering, say, a quote of Srila Prabhupada

supporting the marriage of twelve-year old girls may immediately brand him as a hopeless chauvinist, a true enemy of women, and decide on the spot to have nothing to do with him and his movement. Although such condemnation would be unwarranted, this is the situation we face. It's a sword of Damocles constantly and menacingly hanging over our heads. It would probably be best to adopt an official ISKCON policy saying something like: "We are against child marriage. In extraordinary circumstances we may approve marriage of minors." This is probably the safest direction, not only as a public relations exercise, but also as a general ISKCON standard. There is enough evidence indicating that, for the present cultural and legal environment, Srila Prabhupada would approve.

Substantial Age Gap? Maybe or Maybe Not

Another traditional standard Srila Prabhupada recommended was the idea that the husband should be older than the wife. Why? If the traditional conception of stable family life involves a submissive attitude of the wife,

who sees the husband not only as a life companion but also as a superior from whom to learn, then the age gap helps in creating that respect, that sense of deference. And it helps the husband to see the wife as someone to protect, cherish and nurture; not as a belligerent peer against whom to constantly compete for supremacy. Yes, I know, to contemporary people this may sound like quintessential sexism and illegitimate male domination; but what contemporary people know about the art and science of marital harmony and social stability? Their matrimonial record is abysmal. Can they really teach anyone? Srila Prabhupada made the point on several occasions: "Generally the husband must be older than the wife, at least five years' difference . . . eight years, ten years usual . . . That is healthy. And in no case the girl must not be older than the boy. That's not good at all." (Room Conversation, Mayapur, 27 Feb 1977) He did say these things, but he wasn't a stickler about it. For instance, he wrote to a leader: “So far marriages are concerned, just use your discretion but be sure that marriage does not become a farce. It must be serious. So far age is considered, generally the girl should not be older than the boy but in special case you can use your discrimination. Sometimes it so happens that the girl is older than the boy. In India also

sometimes it so happens that the girl is older than the boy in some provinces. So you can use your discrimination and do the needful." (Letter to Karandhara, 9 October 1971) Srila Prabhupada gave the example of Gandhi, who was younger than his wife:

Prabhupāda: What is the age of your mother?

Bhavānanda: Sixty-eight . . .

Prabhupāda: And what is your father's age?

Bhavānanda: Sixty-eight . . .

Prabhupāda: Same age.

Bhavānanda: Same.

Jayapatākā: American system.

Prabhupāda: No, here also, some cases. Gandhi's wife was one year older than Gandhi. Yes. Kasturba Gandhi, she was seventeen years old, and Gandhi was sixteen years old, and they were married. There are many cases.

Tamāla Kṛṣṇa: That was arranged by their parents, or they did it themselves?

Prabhupāda: Yes, by their parents. Except in Bengal, in other provinces they do not take much care of the age.

(Morning Walk, Mayapur, 9 Feb 1976)

This again shows that Srila Prabhupada's social statements, when taken in isolation, may sound as final and unappealable; but a more nuanced picture emerges when we take his whole output into consideration. In this case, the general advice remains, although he wasn't too fixed about a precise age gap: “the boy should be at least five years older than the girl.” (Letter to Hamsadutta, 18 April 1970) Nonetheless, next month, with remarkable pragmatism, Srila Prabhupada wrote: “Regarding requirements and recommendations in the Vedic system of selecting partners for marriage, there is a Vedic system, but that cannot be done here. It should be made under the guidance of the guardians and the selection should be made on the basis of astrological equilibrium. So it is not possible to introduce such system in the present age. The only selection is that both the boy and the girl should be Krsna conscious, and the boy may be older than the girl at least by 2 to 5 years.” (Letter to Gurudasa, 16 May 1970) Later, the same year, Srila Prabhupada wrote: “if you accept a girl for marriage she should be younger than you. At least she should not exceed your age.” (Letter to Jaya Gopala, 25 August 1970) So, according to the Vedic parameters of gender relationships, an older husband constitutes an advantage, but Srila Prabhupada didn't

consider it an absolute principle. There are so many factors to consider, which makes the whole undertaking quite flexible. Later the same year Srila Prabhupada also wrote: “Regarding marriage, generally the man should be older than the woman. We have not had good experience with marriages when the woman is older. But everything must be done with reference to time, place and circumstance and in your country such a marriage is not uncommon. So if you think the match is good then you may marry them.” (Letter to Rupanuga, 4 November 1970) In conclusion: it's generally better if the wife is younger - two, five, eight, ten years or even more - but same age or older can also be acceptable. Nothing absolute here (and devotees shouldn't get stuck on isolated quotes...)

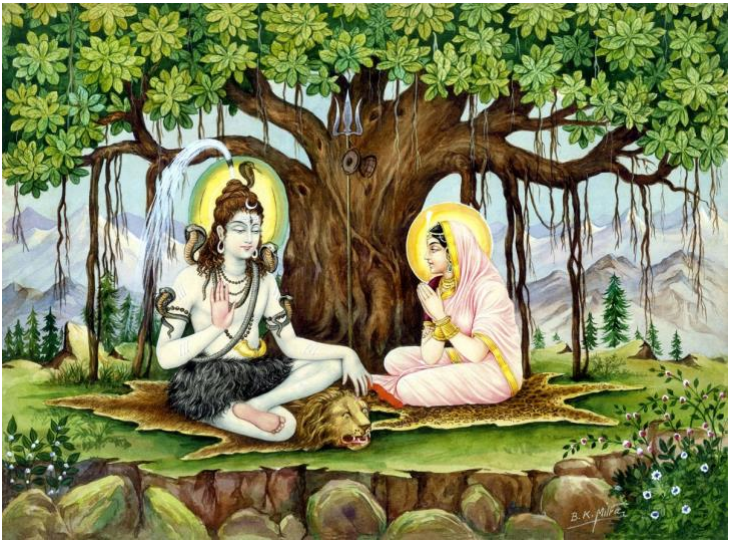
Husband as Guru - But Wife Can Be Guru Too

In traditional India the age difference between spouses was normal and expected. A boy from the upper social groups (*brahmanas, ksatriyas* and *vaisyas*) would have spent years in the school of the spiritual master, the *guru-kula*, serving the teacher, imbibing the culture, building character,

practicing austerities, studying the *sastras* and learning vocational skills. The girl, at home, would have been cultivating chastity, practicing religious rituals, and acquiring the domestic arts. She would grow up within the family environment, protected by mother, father, elder siblings, aunties, uncles, grandmothers, grandfathers (and possibly a larger assortment of relatives) in an extended family. She would marry a more senior boy - 5, 8, 10 years older - a graduate from the school of the spiritual master; a boy properly trained, qualified to take full charge of her as her provider, her spiritual guide, her lover, and the father of her children. The husband, qualified by learning, by age and by behavior, would be able to command respect without demanding it. The newly wedded would be supervised by the elder members of the family, who, as standard-bearers of the culture, would ensure the execution of homely duties. Such set-up would promote the proper development and emotional fulfillment of both man and woman. The economic, child-rearing and other domestic functions were clearly delineated, and each knew what to do, knew what was expected of them. The couple would closely collaborate in spiritual and material pursuits, safeguarding each other from falling into promiscuity and degradation: "a real wife is *dharma-patnī* . . . which

signifies that she is accepted in terms of religious principles . . . The word *dharma-patnī* also refers to a chaste wife. A chaste wife is one who never had any connection with men before her marriage. Once a woman is given the freedom to mingle with all kinds of men in her youth, it is very difficult for her to keep chaste. She generally cannot remain chaste . . . But if one gets a chaste wife, accepted through a religious marriage ritual, she can be of great help when one is threatened by the many dangerous situations of life. Actually such a wife can become the source of all good intelligence. With such a good wife, the family's engagement in the devotional service of the Lord actually makes a home a *gṛhastha-āśrama*, or household dedicated to spiritual cultivation." (SB 4.26.16, purport) In these conditions, with these premises, the reverential attitude of the wife toward the husband would be natural. "If the husband is nice, then wife's position is very secure." (Initiation Lecture, Boston, 21 May 1968) The traditional roles have been determined, since time immemorial, to align with the natural psycho-physical temperament of the genders. She wouldn't feel her subordination as a chauvinistic imposition, as the arrogant demands of an insecure and overbearing male. No. If the husband was properly trained, she would be satisfied in the hierarchical

arrangement, as a disciple gladly submits to the spiritual master. "That is the Vedic system: The wife becomes a devotee of her husband, the husband becomes a devotee of Krishna; the wife serves her husband faithfully, the husband protects his wife by giving her spiritual guidance." (Letter to Saucarya, 23 Jan 1972) We encounter the blueprint of such relationship even in the higher universal echelons, among the cosmic controllers: "Lord Śiva is speaking to his wife, Pārvatī . . . Pārvatī is the personified god of this material energy, Pārvatī, Durgā . . . she is the wife of Lord Śiva. he himself lives underneath a tree. And his wife [is] so powerful that she creates,



maintains and annihilates the universe, but she remains as very obedient, submissive wife of Lord Śiva . . . So what is their business? Their business is: Pārvatī is perpetually asking her husband about spiritual matters, everything, and the husband is replying. That is the duty of husband, and that is also the duty of wife. Wife should get enlightenment from the husband, and she should give service . . . always looking to the comfort of the husband. And it is the duty of the husband to enlighten the wife always. Therefore husband is accepted as guru, *pati-guru*. In India, when a woman speaks of her husband, she says *pati-guru*, 'my husband-master,' *pati-guru*. And it is not the system, Vedic system, to call the husband by name, as in the Western country the husband is called by his name. No. Out of respect, the wife does not call the husband by his real name." (Lecture on Mayavada Philosophy, Honolulu, 17 May 1976)

We have described the ideal, and somewhat idyllic, Vedic marriage scenario, habitual especially for the higher classes. Enter Kali-yuga, with its descending spirals of vice and confusion. Enter Lord Caitanya's salvific *sankirtana* movement, which, while followed only in India, was still largely applying the above traditional dynamics of family

life. Enter Srila Prabhupada, who carried the mission West, implanting *bhakti-yoga* and introducing the essence. of Vedic civilization within a host culture in which the sacred institution of marriage was under the attack of new ideologies. Demagogues were urging the new generations to challenge the natural role of the genders, offering vague, often misleading promises of freedom and emancipation. Some couples came to ISKCON together, adapting, to whatever extent they were able to, to the new, "Vedic" paradigm. Most boys and girls were unmarried when they joined ISKCON. In the movement they found their life partners (in some cases, a short-portion-of-life partner). Some adopted devotional life while already married with a spouse who remained impervious to the charms of Gaudiya-vaisnavism; a situation with which different individuals dealt in different ways. Some came to ISKCON while already married with a partner who was uninterested in the beginning but who later embraced the path of Krishna-*bhakti* due to the efforts of the spouse, either husband or wife: "Regarding your question about the husband becoming the Spiritual Master of the wife, anyone who can give instructing in spiritual life is treated as Spiritual Master. There are two kinds of Spiritual Master, initiator and instructor. So the husband can help

the wife as instructor." (Letter to Himavati, 24 Jan 1969) If the wife embraced the path of Krishna consciousness first, and then she guided her husband in spiritual life, she would be considered his spiritual master: "The actual system is that the husband is Spiritual Master to his wife, but if the wife can bring her husband into practicing this process, then it is all right that the husband accepts wife as Spiritual Master. Caitanya Mahaprabhu has said that anyone who knows the science of Krishna, that person should be accepted as Spiritual Master, regardless of any material so-called qualifications; such as rich or poor, man or woman, or brahmana or sudra." (Letter to Silavati, 14 June 1969) Again: purely spiritual considerations trump social conventions. And the phenomenon of women serving as spiritual masters is not limited to the marriage sphere. Srila Prabhupada exhorted all of his disciples, male and female, to become gurus: "I hope that all of you, men, women, boys and girls, become spiritual master." (Vyasa-puja lecture, London, 22 Aug 1973) His approach followed Gaudiya-vaisnava tradition, which produced Vaisnavi *diksa-guru* in centuries when in the rest of the world women engaged only in domestic duties. While at that time no woman on the planet would become doctor, engineer, lawyer, or judge, in Bengal the women followers

of Lord Caitanya would instruct and initiate disciples; and none of the recognized canonical authorities in the lineage even complained about it. Some of Srila Prabhupada's followers, breaking away from Gaudiya legacy, oppose the idea of women serving as *diksa-gurus* (a truly sexist stance). It's unfortunate that the International Society for Krishna Consciousness counts among its affiliates members who openly disregard the direct and unambiguous instructions of the Founder-*Acarya*, such as this one: "I want that all of my spiritual sons and daughters will inherit this title of Bhaktivedanta, so that the family transcendental diploma will continue through the generations. Those possessing the title of Bhaktivedanta will be allowed to initiate disciples. Maybe by 1975, all of my disciples will be allowed to initiate and increase the numbers of the generations. That is my program." (Letter to Hansadutta, 3 Jan 1969) I addressed the arguments of the anti-women-*diksa-gurus* camp in the 2013 book *Did Srila Prabhupada Want Women Diksa Gurus?*[93] Later, activists of the only-male-*diksa-gurus* persuasion resorted to misrepresent the *Bharadvaja-samhita* - a secondary text. Madan Mohan Prabhu thoroughly exposed and debunked

[93] https://sites.google.com/site/eyeofthestormbooks/ - you can download the book for free.

their distortions in his 2020 book *Guru: The Principle Not the Body*.[94] In conclusion: a woman can become guru not only of her non-devotional husband, but also, in a more formal way, of whoever accepts her as spiritual guide.

All Women Should Marry... Or Not

Srila Prabhupada consistently encouraged women to get married: "it is advised that all women get themselves married," (Letter to Karandhara, 9 Jan 1973) It was a common theme: "illicit sex is very sinful. Every person must get married. Every woman especially must get married." (Cc, *Madhya-lila*, 7.128, purport) But it wasn't an unconditional directive:

Prabhupāda: If one can remain without marriage, that is the first class.
Rūpānuga: Women also?
Prabhupāda: Women also. What is the use of this material

[94] https://docs.google.com/document/d/1LxiVjTxCVLX8qSQybXoBjxPo_DEcqgOJVHxwsjZu_wU/edit. - also available for free.

husband? Make Kṛṣṇa husband. Kṛṣṇa's prepared to become everything—love Him as husband, love Him as son, love Him [as] friend.
(Conversation, Washington DC, 6 July 1976)

So, marriage was the usual recommended option, but Srila Prabhupada didn't consider it as the only way to protect women dedicated to spiritual life: "the women must have a husband to give protection. Of course, if the women can remain unmarried, and if there is suitable arrangement for the temple to protect them, just like in the Christian Church there is nunnery for systematic program of engaging the ladies and protecting them, that is also nice."
(Letter to Madhukara, 4 Jan 1973)

Srila Prabhupada performs the wedding of three couples. Boston, 6 May 1969.

This idea reminds of a project tha Srila Prabhupada's spiritual master, Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura, had envisioned: "Please see the whole race of women as beloved consorts of Krishna, and help them to always engage themselves in the service of Krishna . . . Of course, those who have the facility and opportunity for devotional service in their own homes do not need a separate residence. But every so often we hear that many of them get impeded in their devotional service due to bad association. It would be very beneficial for them if we could build Sri Vishnupriya-palli [*palli* means *neighborhood*] in Sridham Mayapur near the residence of Sriman Mahaprabhu, and if they can live there separately from their families and render devotional service." (Lecture, 21 Sept 1925; *Sarasvati Jayasri*, p. 339) Besides, even according to the *smriti-sastra* it is better for a girl to remain unmarried than to marry an underserving man: "(But) the maiden, though marriageable, should rather stop in (the father's) house until death, than that he should ever give her to a man destitute of good qualities." (*Manu-samhita* 9.89) And so we encounter general guidelines, applicable for most women, but also special arrangements for special cases. Another example of Srila Prabhupada's adaptability

(a flexibility that may remain hidden if one focuses only on specific quotes, ignoring the rest).

Churning Butter & Arguing with Scholars

The subject of occupational engagements for women is an area in which Srila Prabhupada's directions can result truly confusing if taken in isolation. For instance, if we look (only) at a speech in which he stresses traditional domestic duties, he might appear totally closed to anything else. Here he is speaking in a rural community in West Virginia:

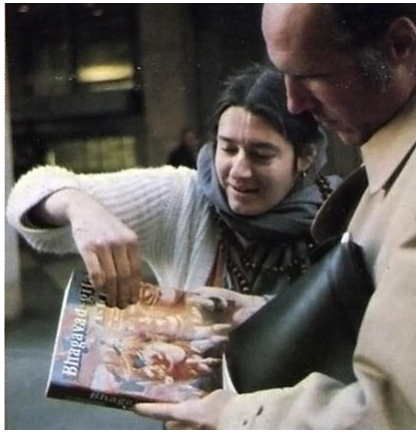
Srila Prabhupada in New Vrindavana.

"Here in this spot, New Vrindavana, the woman's business will be to take care of the children, cooking, cleansing, and churning butter. (laughter) And those who have the knowledge of typing can help in typing also. No other

hard work. That's all. This is for woman." (Lecture, New Vrindavana, 22 June 1969) You can hear the loud laughter when Srila Prabhupada mentions "churning butter," as apparently even the devotees present didn't find the suggestion too practical or attractive (I don't know of anyone in New Vrindavana today who is manually churning butter). The atmosphere is relaxed and intimate as Srila Prabhupada talks and jokes with the devotees. You can hear the whole speech.[95] He again mentions churning butter: "And for men, hard work, field work, taking care of the cows, of the animals, to go to collect wood, to construct building . . . They will work hard. And the churning business is for the girls [again the devotees laugh]. That will keep your health very nice." Srila Prabhupada was serious about churning butter, but he was *proposing* a lifestyle, not *imposing* it. In a letter written two days later, he himself appears tentative about the suggestion: "The first thing is that whether the girls and women who live there are agreeable to work as I have suggested; namely 1) to take care of the children, both from health and educational point of view, 2) to keep the whole temple, kitchen, etc. very clean . . . 3) cooking, 4) churning butter." (Letter to Kirtanananda, 24 June 1969)

[95] https://vanisource.org/wiki/690622_-_Lecture_-_New_Vrindaban,_USA

Taken out of context, a sentence from the talk above ("the woman's business will be to take care of the children, cooking, cleansing, and churning butter . . . That's all") may sound like the head of a conservative religious cult coercing twentieth century American women into adopting the lifestyle of Indian villages - as their only choice. But that would be a totally false impression. Srila Prabhupada may *sound* inflexible, but he is quite plastic, navigating various circumstances in an adaptable way, remaining strict on principles and malleable on details. In another letter involving New Vrindavana, Srila Prabhupada complained that the women book distributors were now in the farm: "So far as the woman distributors who have left New York and Boston Temples and have gone to New Vrindaban, they should return immediately and resume their original service. In Chaitanya



The late Gauri Devi distributing the Gita. *Srila Prabhupada wrote: "Your sankirtana reports are very encouraging, especially that one girl, Gauri dasi, who has set an all ISKCON women's record of 108 big books. This is very wonderful." (Letter to Rupanuga, 18 Dec 1974)*

Mahaprabhu's Movement, everyone is preacher, whether man or woman it doesn't matter. I do not know why Kirtananda Maharaj is encouraging our woman devotees not to go out on Sankirtan for book distribution. Everyone should go out." (Letter to Karandhara, 6 Oct 1973) New Vrindavana was a special experiment in implementing traditional rural life; but Srila Prabhupada envisioned a variety of occupations for his lady followers: "the boys and girls in our Krsna Society should now give more attention for studying the books very attentively . . . I hope in Washington center you will ask all the boys and girls to follow this method, because henceforward we will have to face many scholars and philosophers to stabilize our Krsna Consciousness movement." (Letter to Krsna Devi, 17 Feb 1970) Srila Prabhupada's views of women's engagements ranged from churning butter on the hills of West Virginia to discussing with academics in the universities of the American capital, Washington DC. Although he celebrated chastity, he didn't see it as antithetical to strong, energetic, public presentation of Krishna consciousness. The two things weren't mutually exclusive in Srila Prabhupada's mind. In fact, he considered assertive outreach as a path to chastity and meekness. He wrote to four young women who were troubled by the apparent

dichotomy: "Regarding the problem of how to be aggressive on Samkirtan [book distribution] and submissive in the temple, my request to you is that you should go on being aggressive on Samkirtan. I myself was aggressive in coming to your country. No one invited me. Even you boys and girls did not invite me. But, I came and I preached aggressively, and therefore you are now my disciples. So now you well know you have to approach the men and women of your country, and it may appear that superficially that you have to disturb them. They are doing their business peacefully, and you come and disturb them, 'Please take this Krishna book.' Of course it is good that you are concerned about being chaste, shy, and submissive amongst your godbrothers. Chanakya Pandit said that every man should see all other women as mother, and similarly a woman should see all men as son. So what is your difficulty? If you are completely aggressive on Samkirtan, there should be no material aggressiveness and pride remaining. You have to distinguish between devotees and non-devotees . . . If you become completely absorbed in such aggression to spread Samkirtan Movement, there will be no question of wanting to lord it over in the temple. Preaching purifies us of these material tendencies for sense gratification. It is simply a matter of

time that you will see this. Do not worry. Krishna will help you." (Letter to Jagaddhatri, Pasupati, Sailogata and Pamela, 30 July 1975) This flexibility wasn't just a contingency plan dictated by modern circumstances. Vedic culture did contemplate a variety of engagements for women, depending on their nature. For instance, in *the Mahabharata*, Lord Krishna tells Yudhisthira that in Dvaraka, even the ladies can and would fight if needed: *striyo 'pi yasya yudhyeyuh ki punar vrsni-pugavah*. (MB 2.13.51) The *Mahabharata* also narrates that when Krsna visited the Pandavas in Indraprastha, all the royals went for a pleasure trip on the Yamuna. The leisure activities included a wrestling tournament - among the women.

Are Women Really *That* Lusty?

"Women are normally very lusty, more lusty than men." (Letter to Madhukara, 4 Jan 1974) That was a private communication, but Srila Prabhupada made similar hyper-sexist-sounding remarks also publicly, in his books: "Women as a class are very lusty, and apparently their continuous lusty desires are never satisfied. (SB 6.9.9, purport) On one occasion Srila Prabhupada quantified the ratio of lust of the genders, suggesting a portentous

proportion: "It is understood that the sexual appetite of a woman is nine times greater than that of a man." (SB 3.23.44, purport) At times this purport came to my mind when the onslaught of hormonal blasts subjected me to severe carnal cravings. The message appeared inconceivable. I wondered, "How can a woman possibly experience lusty yearnings *nine times* greater than mine?!" I found that intensity hard to visualize. Nine times?! I imagined that her body would just explode in a ball of fire. I couldn't visualize a human organism - or a human psyche - sustaining that kind of pressure without self-destructing. Srila Prabhupada's estimate closely tallied with a dictum by Canakya Pandita, in his *Niti-sastra*, "Women have . . . lust [*kāma*] eight-fold as compared to men." And so I ponder: what modern researchers say about the difference in sex drive of men and women? It turns out that their findings do seriously challenge Srila Prabhupada's and Canakya's pronouncements, at least on one level. For instance, a study published on the site of the US *National Library of Medicine* concludes that, "Sexual desire is typically higher in men than in women."[96] Another study, quoted in *Psychology Today*, states that, "Men have a stronger sex drive than women, and this gender difference

[96] https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/22552705/

is evident in cross-cultural research involving men and women from 53 different countries."[97] What's going on? Was Srila Prabhupada's assessment not only inaccurate but way off? Is Indian tradition prejudiced, blind to the real facts? Let's try to get to the bottom of this thing. A 2013 article from *The Atlantic* - "How Strong Is the Female Sex Drive After All?" - delves into these matters, quoting social psychologist Roy Baumeister, who had "set out to determine if the female sex drive was indeed weaker than the male sex drive . . . Baumeister and two (female) colleagues set to work reviewing hundreds of studies about human sexuality and found consistently that women are less motivated by sex than men are." We must distinguish between the desire for the physical sexual act, with focus on physical pleasure, and the more subtle, *distributed* aspects of sexuality. If we miss this distinction, Srila Prabhupada's statements may remain puzzling and disturbing. But for now, let's go back to Baumeister and his colleagues: "For men, they found, the goal of sex is sex itself. One 1996 study found that seven in ten men--compared to four in ten women--said the goal of sexual desire was simply having sex. In the same study, 35 percent

[97] https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/dating-and-mating/202003/how-high-sex-drive-works-differently-in-men-and-women

of women said that love and intimacy were important goals of sex compared to 13 percent of men. Men also think about sex more, according to studies. When men and women monitor their sexual urges over a seven-day period, men report having twice as many sexual urges as women do . . . Men feel guiltier about sex. They feel guiltier about masturbating than women do (13 percent versus 10 percent) and they feel guiltier about thinking about sex than women do. For instance, men report having more unwanted and uncontrollable thoughts about sex. In one survey, men responded more affirmatively to the following statements than women did: 'I think about sex more than I would like' and 'I must fight to keep my sexual thoughts and behavior under control.' The sexual patterns of Catholic priests and nuns are relevant here . . . A 1995 survey found that most priests masturbate. A 1992 study of several hundred clergy found that 62 percent of male clergy and 49 percent of female clergy had been sexually active since taking their vows, and the men had had more partners--about a quarter of the clergymen had five or more partners while only three percent of the women had that many. In marriage, where women are encouraged to have sex, they still want to do so at lower rates. A 1977 survey of couples who had been married for

20 years found that men wanted more sex than their wives. As Baumeister and his colleagues write, 'Wives consistently reported that they were quite satisfied with the amount of sex they had in their marriages, but men on average wished for about a 50 percent increase.' A study of elderly couples from Sweden, a country that is sexually progressive, also found that married men wanted more sex than women. 'Men are significantly more sexual than women, in all ages and in all respects,' wrote the authors of that study . . . men, without the constraint of a woman saying no, appear to be far more promiscuous than women." Anecdotical evidence indicates that also ISKCON husbands generally pursue sex more than their wives. "'Females,' Baumeister writes, 'constitute the restraining force on sex. That is, they refuse many offers or chances for sexual activity. When sex happens, it is because the woman has changed her vote from no to yes.' In a classic 1989 study, for instance, attractive research assistants approached men and women of the opposite sex on a college campus and asked: 'I've been noticing you around campus and I think you're attractive. Would you like to go to bed with me tonight?' Three quarters of men said yes. Exactly zero women did." Hmm... If women

"constitute the restraining force on sex"[98] and if they consistently tend to turn down casual proposals for sex, what Srila Prabhupada could really mean by saying that "Women are normally very lusty, more lusty than men"?

To make sense of his assertion - what to speak of defending it - we need to start with fine-tuning our understanding of *lust*. In Srila Prabhupada's books *lust* is often the translation of the Sanskrit and Bengali word *kāma*, but other meanings are also given in word-by-word renditions. Translations range from the sensual plane ("sense gratification," "satisfaction of the senses") to the more emotional dimension ("amorous love"), to the more general ("desire," "material desire," "sex life," "Cupid," or even "necessities"). *Kāma* can carry a strong sexual connotation, but that's not its only meaning. But, even taking *kāma* in a sexual sense, my understanding is that women's sexuality is more *diffused*, so to speak, their erotism more widespread. Women's sex drive isn't expressed exclusively or prominently as longing for sexual, genital union (as it often happens for men), but it's distributed throughout their way of being - it's more

[98] https://www.theatlantic.com/sexes/archive/2013/07/how-strong-is-the-female-sex-drive-after-all/277429/

horizontal: "By their nature, gestures, dress, women are lusty—that is their habit." (Letter, name withheld, 17 Dec 1972)

Different embodied beings are endowed with different *vibhūtis*, special innate faculties for surviving in this world and for experiencing certain facets of life. Natural flairs manifest as the nimble agility of squirrels, as the stone-hard

shells of tortoises, as the camouflaging knack of chameleons, and as the pervasive undertow of feminine charms in women: "The creator has constructed women in such a way that their beautiful voices and movements and the beautiful features of their hips, their breasts, and the other parts of their bodies attract the members of the opposite sex, both on earth and on other planets, and awaken their lusty desires." (SB 5.2.6, purport) Attraction is power. Like the speed of the cheetah in the savannah or the strength of the gorilla in the jungle, feminine fascinations represent tangible survival currency in the human habitat. We conditioned souls are here to (try to) control and enjoy. Attracting and subjugating a man's mind means exercising control over him: "It is sometimes understood that a person becomes lusty just by hearing the tinkling of bangles on the hands of women or the tinkling of ankle bells, or just by seeing a woman's sari." (SB 4.24.12, purport) A woman can *enjoy* a man simply by exerting her magnetism over him; she doesn't need to sleep with him. It appears that generally women experience *kāma* as a subtle undercurrent permeating their lifestyle; a suffused but persistent trace of sensuality exhibited, for instance, in embellishing their bodies and highlighting their physical features through jewelries,

cosmetics, clothing and other articles. Generally men feel more comfortable with wearing the same clothes every day, with possessing fewer accessories, or with limiting toiletries to the bare minimum; but rare is the woman satisfied with the plainest and the simplest; the woman who doesn't nurture her appearance or doesn't indulge in prettying herself up. "A woman is naturally... her psychology is dress very nicely . . . they are by nature accustomed to dress attractively so that one may accept her and give her shelter. This is psychology. Otherwise, why the women are naturally inclined to dress herself nice? Man does not. This is the psychology. A boy, sixteen-years-old boy, he does not... he is roughly dressed . . . but a sixteen-year-old girl will never remain roughly. She'll always try to decorate herself very nicely and utilize her youthful beauty for attracting." This appears to be the primary meaning of "more lusty than men." If you lived with a woman (or if you are a woman), you must have noticed (or experienced) different degrees of the feminine propensity for accumulating varieties of dresses, shoes, hats or bags. You must have become aware that, differently than most men, women collect all sorts of rings (for fingers, toes, noses, etc.), earrings, necklaces, pendants, bracelets, anklets, armlets, bangles and brooches. You

might have detected women's habit of plastering their faces (often attractive even when left alone) with fanciful foundations, implausible blushers, multicolored lipsticks, skin cremes of mysterious origins and unintelligible objectives, magical powders, supernatural oils and other paranormal mixtures and concoctions, all astonishing in their complexity and breathtaking in their pricing. You might have observed how female undergarments (presumably utilitarian in function and hopefully private in nature) may display all sorts of ornamentations - such as laces, ribbons and meshes - and come in countless colors and in patterns of hearts, teddy-bears, butterflies, and other adorable depictions. You must have seen the attempts at beautifying the eyes (often, I must add, with dubious results) by adding eye shadows, or by attempting to elongate eyelashes, or by masochistically plucking one's eyebrows (I am yet to be convinced that thin, tortured eyebrows result more attractive than healthy, natural ones). The investment of time and money on a woman's face should make it as costly as a Van Gogh, but it all gets washed away every evening. To this extravaganza of fleeting beautifications, add a procession of deodorants, a pageant of perfumes, a parade of shampoos, a cavalcade of hair conditioners, and a motorcade of nail polishes (all

vitally important, especially on special occasions such as devotional festivals). To top it all, for many ISKCON ladies, add traditional symbolic marks such as *bindis* (available in myriads of assortments) and religious accoutrements such as bead-bags and Tulasi neck-beads (also obtainable in a dizzying variety of artistic arrangements). This tendency to beautify and augment the female form (and I have not touched on cosmetic surgeries and implants) is not *sexual* in the sense of directly aiming at physical contact. In fact, the inclination toward fancy, frilly dresses, is observed also in prepubescent girls.[99] Care in dressing and ornamenting oneself is not a sin, and it's even recommended as part of the *dharma* of married women: "A woman is generally accustomed to dress herself nicely with fine garments and decorative ornaments . . . It is the duty of the wife to dress herself up very nicely so that when her husband returns home he becomes attracted by her dress and cleanliness

[99] https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/24274727/

and thus becomes satisfied." (SB 4.27.2, purport) I suggest that statements indicating that women are more lusty than men should be understood primarily through this perspective: greater *kāma* in the sense of extra concentration on bodily beauty and beautifications; not necessarily as a higher focus on sexual union. We can interpret the larger amount of *lust* as the inborn cravings for profuse clothing and ornamentations - not as greater yearnings for coitus (which remains a manly feature).

Another possible angle for explaining a woman's higher degree of *kāma* could be hidden in the brain, according to the theory of Japanese neurologist Dr. Kunio Kitamura, co-author of "Sex no Subete ga Wakaru Hon" (*Everything You Need to Know About Sex*). Perhaps an explanation of women being "more lusty" can be found in the alleged superior intensity of women's sexual climax. Kitamura writes, "When it comes to the difference between male and female sexuality . . . There's a hint hidden in the brainwaves . . . When an orgasm has been achieved through sex, you can measure theta waves. These are also said to cause the 'running high' feeling of euphoria experienced sometimes by marathon runners. If theta waves are taken as a criterion, the entire brain emits theta

waves when women reach an orgasm that are close on 10 times stronger than when men climax. So, if theta waves are an indication of an orgasm's strength, then women experience an orgasm that is physically impossible for men to go through. Putting it a little crudely, if the intensity of a woman's orgasm was played through a man's brain, there's a danger that the shock to his system would kill him."[100] Frankly, I didn't find much corroboration or referencing of the above, but the idea could contribute to neurologically explain the statement about women and their greater "lust." But who am I to say.

"The Only Real Husband of All Women"

Srila Prabhupada primarily wanted women to be Krishna conscious. Yes, he recommended that fathers, husbands and grown-up sons offer them protection. He encouraged women to marry and faithfully assist their husbands, but ultimately he wanted them to understand that their real

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https://www.science20.com/science_amp_supermodels/would_female_orgasms_kill_men

shelter and husband is Krishna, not the temporary husband: "In the material world the varieties are reflection of the spiritual world. Here is also father, but this is imitation father . . . A friend is imitation friend. Real friend is Kṛṣṇa. Real father is Kṛṣṇa. Here husband, imitation husband. Real husband is Kṛṣṇa . . . So in this way, if we establish our relationship with Kṛṣṇa . . . either as husband or lover or master or friend or son or father, it is perfect. It is perfect. We have to go to that stage. We have to give up this imitation . . . That is explained by Caitanya Mahāprabhu . . . if you accept Kṛṣṇa as your father, oh, He'll give you all protection. If you accept Kṛṣṇa as your husband, oh, there is no question of divorce. If you accept Kṛṣṇa as your friend, oh, Kṛṣṇa will give you everything. So, so many relationships. All these relationships in the relative world, they are all shadow, or temporary. But the same thing is there in the spiritual world. And if we come to that platform, then there will be happiness." (Lecture on SB 1.5.2, Los Angeles, 10 Jan 1968) Srila Prabhupada stressed the two simultaneous needs: the socio-psychological need for a stable *asrama* situation, and the spiritual need to cultivate one's devotion and connecting with our divine, permanent shelter. Fulfilling the first need provides a conducive platform to nurture the second:

Prabhupāda: One has to become pure devotee, that's all. Other things, of course, are circumstantially favorable, either a *gṛhastha, brahmacārī* or *vānaprastha or sannyāsa* . . . The nature is that they are dependent, woman, by nature. Do you admit or not?

Pālikā: Yes.

Prabhupāda: And the Western countries, they have been taught to become independent. That is artificial. That is all artificial. So woman by nature... *Manu-saṁhitā* (9.3) says, *na striyaṁ svatantram arhati*: "Women should not be given independence." They must be protected by the father, by husband, and by elderly sons . . .

Jagadīśa: Most of the women, or at least many of the women in our society, have neither father, husband or sons.

Prabhupāda: It is very precarious condition. So we want to give them, all of them, "Come and live" . . . if you get husband we have no objection . . . Because the Kali-yuga, the more it advances, people will be suffering in so many ways. And the only solace is Kṛṣṇa consciousness—only solution. If one becomes Kṛṣṇa conscious, then he [she] doesn't require husband. He [she] does not require . . . She knows that "Kṛṣṇa is my protector. Why shall I artificially seek after father or... ?" And what protection,

for a few days, either the father or the son or the husband may give? Real protection is Kṛṣṇa. This is temporary. But because we have got this material body we require some." (Conversation, Bombay, 7 Jan 1977)

In the *Bhagavatam*, Lakṣmīdevī, the goddess of fortune Herself, makes a similar point while offering prayers to Lord Kāmadeva, Pradyumna, a form of Krishna: "My dear Lord, You are certainly the fully independent master of all the senses. Therefore all women who worship You by strictly observing vows because they wish to acquire a husband to satisfy their senses are surely under illusion. They do not know that such a husband cannot actually give protection to them or their children. Nor can he protect their wealth or duration of life, for he himself is dependent on time, fruitive results and the modes of nature, which are all

subordinate to You. He alone who is never afraid but who, on the contrary, gives complete shelter to all fearful persons can actually become a husband and protector. Therefore, my Lord, You are the only husband, and no one else can claim this position. If You were not the only husband, You would be afraid of others. Therefore persons learned in all Vedic literature accept only Your Lordship as everyone's master, and they think no one else a better husband and protector than You." (SB 5.18.19-20) Later in the *Bhagavatam* the same goddess of fortune, this time in the form of Rukmiṇī-devī, the first consort of Lord Krishna, makes a similar statement, using graphic imagery: "A woman who fails to relish the fragrance of the honey of Your lotus feet becomes totally befooled, and thus she accepts as her husband or lover a living corpse covered with skin, whiskers, nails, head-hair and body-hair and filled with flesh, bones, blood, parasites, feces, mucus, bile and air." (SB 10.60.45) Within Vedic culture (and therefore in Srila Prabhupada's teachings) we observe this tension between the vigorous encouragement that women enter the *grihastha-asrama* and loyally serve their earthly husbands, and the simultaneous strong exhortation that women cultivate their relation with their eternal husband, Sri Krishna: "the only real husband of all women is Kṛṣṇa,

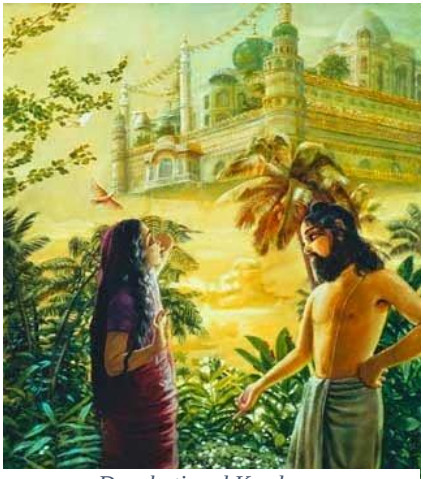
the supreme husband . . . Kṛṣṇa is the original master or husband of everyone." (SB 5.18.19, purport) Both aspects should harmoniously combine, for the upliftment and ultimate happiness of all men and women.

Follow the Husband 100% - Or Give Him Up If Fallen

Srila Prabhupada consistently advised women to be submissive to their husbands: "A wife's duty is to follow the husband cent-percent." (SB 1.9.48, purport) This reference is in the *Bhagavatam*; the next one is from a personal letter to a lady disciple: "you should simply do whatever your husband instructs you to do." (Letter to Saucarya, 23 Jan 1972) Sexismophobic people (see, I can also make words up), may feel indignant and furious reading such statements. Srila Prabhupada was aware of the cultural clash, of the fact that his ideas weren't universally appreciated: "I am speaking of the Vedic ideas . . . that wife remains always faithful and subservient to the husband. That is their perfection. Now the Americans may not like this idea. That is different thing. But we are speaking of the Vedic culture." (Conversation after press

conference, Chicago, 9 July 1975) The United States and other culturally backward nations, such as France and Burundi, are showing their incapacity for peaceful social dealings, for interracial harmony and for matrimonial stability. Divorce rate in the US is almost 50 percent (a coin toss). In France it's 55 percent. Burundi is doing better at around 18 percent (of breakups for first marriages), but France and the US are certainly in no position, on average, to offer advice on marriage stability or to provide a dependable theory of what works in the relationship of the genders. Their societies are agonizingly disintegrating without a reliable conceptual existential framework. Nonetheless, we can indirectly learn from their misguided social models and policies. India - even

the deteriorated, contemporary India - has a divorce rate of about 1 percent; out of one hundred marriages, only one ends up in divorce. Shouldn't the world take a serious look at India's cultural roots? If the people of the world were smart, they would. Westerners (and westernized people in general) may imagine that Srila Prabhupada's views derived from a primitive, rudimentary framework but in fact his recommendations stemmed from a refined grasp of gender psychology, from a sophisticated understanding of the complex interplay between men and women. He is not simply parroting some obscure or obsolete *dharma-sastras*; he is teaching practical lessons on how to have a successful marriage - today, tomorrow, and in a thousand years. He explains in the *Bhagavatam*: "Devahūti [mother of Kapiladeva and wife of Kardama Muni] served her husband in two ways, *viśrambheṇa* and *gauraveṇa*. These are two important processes in serving the husband



Devahuti and Kardama

or the Supreme Personality of Godhead. *Viśrambheṇa* means 'with intimacy,' and *gauraveṇa* means 'with great reverence.' The husband is a very intimate friend; therefore, the wife must render service just like an intimate friend, and at the same time she must understand that the husband is superior in position, and thus she must offer him all respect. A man's psychology and woman's psychology are different. As constituted by bodily frame, a man always wants to be superior to his wife, and a woman, as bodily constituted, is naturally inferior to her husband. Thus the natural instinct is that the husband wants to post himself as superior to the wife, and this must be observed. Even if there is some wrong on the part of the husband, the wife must tolerate it, and thus there will be no misunderstanding between husband and wife. *Viśrambheṇa* means 'with intimacy,' but it must not be familiarity that breeds contempt. According to the Vedic civilization, a wife cannot call her husband by name. In the present civilization the wife calls her husband by name, but in Hindu civilization she does not. Thus the inferiority and superiority complexes are recognized." (SB 3.23.2, purport) A few quick annotations (a series of books could be written just on this excerpt). A particularly sensitive sentence is "Even if there is some wrong on the part of the

husband, the wife must tolerate it." We will see that there are limits to this recommendation; it's not a blank cheque for the husband to do any nonsense he likes and still remain the recipient of obedience. First, the "superiority" and "inferiority" discussed here are not ontological. They are physical, social, and circumstantial. Let's take, for instance, this sentence from the purport: "a woman, as bodily constituted, is naturally inferior." She is (generally) smaller and weaker; she needs support when pregnant and nursing; in a civilized society she is not expected to be "productive" for many months, actually for years, when having babies. In fact, in advanced societies she is never forced to do anything outside the household (unless she truly wishes to). Her bodily frame makes her vulnerable to harassment and worse. Srila Prabhupada said: "Any young man, when he has got sixteen years old, he can attack any woman. But a woman, even though she is sixteen years or eighteen years or twenty years, she becomes immediately victim . . . A sixteen-year-old boy can go safely all over the world, but a sixteen-year girl cannot. That is not possible." (Lecture on SB 1.15.20, Los Angeles, 30 Nov 1973) (Literally speaking it is "possible"; but its' extremely dangerous for a young girl to travel extensively alone.) These are the facts of life. Like it or not, there are so many

wicked men around who can and will overpower a defenseless woman. Srila Prabhupada also acknowledges the traits of the male ego within the couple's dynamics: "a man always wants to be superior to his wife." This is not a divine characteristic but a sign of conditioning of souls embodied as human males. That's why Srila Prabhupada, in a non-technical way, speaks of the *superiority complex* of the man. A complex is not something positive; it's defined as "an emotional problem that causes someone to think or worry too much about something." (Merriam-Webster) In this case, the male is engrossed in being the lord and master of the situation. In psychoanalysis, a *complex* is "a group of emotional ideas or impulses that have been banished from the conscious mind but that continue to influence a person's behaviour." (Collins) The husband may be a devotee, and so he knows, intellectually, that he is neither male nor female; he knows that he is not the body; but his acquired psychophysical nature impels him to think and act in a certain way: "the natural instinct is that the husband wants to post himself as superior to the wife." The man is subject to macho automatisms, as if neurologically programmed. Srila Prabhupada adds, "and this must be observed." In other words, although prakritic, *guna*-based, hormone-driven,

conditioned and external to the self, the male mentality has to be tactfully dealt with. It needs expertise. It's like handling a small child: you can't just bang his head to the wall every time he cries; otherwise you will soon end up childless (and in jail). Similarly, the wife can't indiscriminately try to match the husband's ego vagaries with her own ego tantrums, trying to oppose his compulsive self-importance with constant confrontation and irritability. Otherwise, she may soon find herself husbandless. Without a healthy, reasonable dose of tolerance, she will become livid and exasperated; she will file for divorce and for child custody. She may then again place herself on the relationship market (with a depreciated product, as she is now older, less attractive, and possibly saddled with kids). And who can guarantee that the next husband (if she finds one) will be more mature, sensitive, pleasant, and compatible? So, what's the alternative? Should she just endlessly endure male conceit and arrogance? It turns out that Srila Prabhupada has the solution; it's not an "in your face," openly antagonistic way; it's a rather subtle, strategic method, one that works (among civilized people) for keeping marriages together and for the wife to get what she wants. Srila Prabhupada describes the method in connection with the extreme case

of an old, grumpy sage and of his much younger, princessly wife: "Cyavana Muni had an irritable temperament. His wife, Sukanyā, could understand his attitude, and under the circumstances she treated him accordingly. If any wife wants to be happy with her husband, she must try to understand her husband's temperament and please him. This is victory for a woman. Even in the dealings of Lord Kṛṣṇa with His different queens, it has been seen that although the queens were the daughters of great kings, they placed themselves before Lord Kṛṣṇa as His maidservants. However great a woman may be, she must place herself before her husband in this way; that is to say, she must be ready to carry out her husband's orders and please him in all circumstances. Then her life will be successful. When the wife becomes as irritable as the husband, their life at home is sure to be disturbed or ultimately completely broken. In the modern day, the wife is never submissive, and therefore home life is broken even by slight incidents. Either the wife or the husband may take advantage of the divorce laws. According to the Vedic law, however, there is no such thing as divorce laws, and a woman must be trained to be submissive to the will of her husband. Westerners contend that this is a slave mentality for the wife, but factually it is

not; it is the tactic by which a woman can conquer the heart of her husband, however irritable or cruel he may be." (SB 9.3.10, purport) Putting it in another way, Srila Prabhupada said, "Man wants that woman should be subordinate, faithful to him. Then he is ready to take charge. The man's mentality, woman's mentality, different. So if the woman agrees to remain faithful and subordinate to man, then the family life will be peaceful." (Television Interview, Chicago, 9 July 1975)

If this is sexism, OK, so be it. Srila Prabhupada is sexist. I am sexist. Reality is sexist; and you should seriously consider being or becoming a sexist too. This is not a treatise on marital harmony, and therefore I am keeping

the pointers to a minimum; many books could be written - and, I believe, will be written - demonstrating the superiority of the Vedic principles over the disoriented, dicey, speculative, and unproven contemporary theories. There are certainly many more considerations that simply saying the wife "must be ready to carry out her husband's orders and please him in all circumstances." Of course, there are conditions; every social interaction follows the principle of interdependence. Roles and functions - such as the *dharma* of husbands and the *dharma* of wives - do not exist in isolation from cultural, legal, or economic factors; and when a component of the equation changes, especially in a significant way, other elements will have to adapt. For instance, Srila Prabhupada fully recognizes that, for being workable, this approach needs qualified men. You can't just take a dysfunctional, childish, insecure idiot and ask an intelligent, educated, brilliant woman to vow unquestionable obedience to him. Srila Prabhupada was painfully aware that nowadays men's caliber is abysmal, due to lack of sense control, character, knowledge, and direction in life:

Brahmānanda: Actually, they are just feeling frustrated, because it is a fact that woman has been exploited by the men. So now they want to counteract this.

Prabhupāda: No, we don't say that woman should be exploited by men. We say the man should be responsible and give protection to woman.

Brahmānanda: But they feel so angry from the exploitation that they cannot accept that actually a man could protect them.

Prabhupāda: That is bad experience. But the ideal is different. Ideal is that man must be first class and he must be responsible to take care of the woman, and she should be given all protection, all necessities. That is the duty of man . . . all comforts. And because there is no first-class man to take charge of the woman, they are declaring independence. All the men are doing that. They keep girlfriend, make her pregnant and go away, goes away . . . That we also said, that there is no first-class men. So if there is first-class men, then whole question is solved.

Jagadīśa: The men are behaving just like dogs.

Prabhupāda: Yes.

(Room Conversation after press conference, Chicago, 9 July 1975)

This book is not written as a detailed sociological dissertation on how to fix the ills of society, but I can tell

you one thing, a most important thing (a textbook case of "important but not urgent" activity): the most effective and impactful policy is to reorient the educational system to align with the principles of *guru-kula* as described in the *Bhagavatam* and in the *Upanisads*, and as tirelessly promoted by Srila Prabhupada. Anyway, back to men and women and their marriages. As I was saying, there are conditions. Vaisnava culture is not blind to exceptions and emergencies. For example, the Vedic literatures emphasize the importance of obeying one's guru; but the scriptural tradition recommends that gurus should be abandoned when they lose their capacity to distinguish right from wrong, good from evil, virtue from sin. Similarly, the scriptures authorize and even instruct a chaste wife to stop serving a fallen husband and to give up his association. Srila Prabhupada writes: "It is recommended . . . that a chaste wife not associate with a fallen husband. A fallen husband is one who is addicted to the four principles of sinful activity — namely illicit sex, meat-eating, gambling and intoxication. Specifically, if one is not a soul surrendered to the Supreme Personality of Godhead, he is understood to be contaminated. Thus a chaste woman is advised not to agree to serve such a husband. It is not that a chaste woman should be like a slave while her husband

is *narādhama,* the lowest of men. Although the duties of a woman are different from those of a man, a chaste woman is not meant to serve a fallen husband. If her husband is fallen, it is recommended that she give up his association . . . Similarly, a husband can separate himself from a woman who is not chaste according to the description of the *śāstra.* The conclusion is that a husband should be a pure Vaiṣṇava and that a woman should be a chaste wife with all the symptoms described in this regard. Then both of them will be happy and make spiritual progress in Kṛṣṇa consciousness." (SB 7.11.28, purport) Srila Prabhupada was commenting on a verse spoken by Narada Muni. Lord Krishna Himself makes a similar point while speaking to the *gopīs*: "Women who desire a good destination in the next life should never abandon a husband who has not fallen from his religious standards, even if he is obnoxious, unfortunate, old, unintelligent, sickly or poor." (SB 10.29.25) In the purport, the team of scholars led by Hridayananda Maharaja share the following observation: "in the Western world men have abused and exploited women, and now there is a popular movement in which women reject the authority of their husbands. Ideally, men should be staunch in spiritual life and give pure, sincere guidance to the women under their care." The purport

also refers to Śrīla Viśvanātha Cakravartī Thakura and his quoting the *smṛti-śāstra: patiṁ tv apatitaṁ bhajet*, "One should serve a master who is not fallen." Sārvabhauma Bhaṭṭācārya had expressed the same message in a talk with Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu: "When the husband falls down, it is the wife's duty to relinquish the relationship. 'When a husband is fallen, his relationship must be given up.' (*patiṁ ca patitaṁ tyajet*)" (Cc, *Madhya-lila*, 15.264-265) Giving up one's husband is of course a momentous decision, to be taken only when it's undeniably necessary and after extensive consultations with trusted counsellors. The fallen condition of the husband should be substantial; not that the wife should abandon him at the first sign of unholiness or annoyance. In conclusion, yes, Srila Prabhupada did recommend tolerance and submissiveness to wives, but within rational limits.

Indian Culture: More Treasured After Seeing the Crumbling of the West

I find the following quote particularly revealing. Srila Prabhupada is in France; he had been directly observing

Western social realities for more than ten years. He has seen the casual shattering of many marriages, and this made him appreciate the standards of Indian culture more than when he was in India: "If wife is very good, then his home is very nice. They cannot be unhappy at any circumstances. *Dampatyoḥ kalaho nāsti tatra śrīḥ svayam āgataḥ.* Cāṇakya Paṇḍita. When there is full agreement between husband and wife, cooperation, then the goddess of fortune comes there without application. You haven't got to ask goddess of fortune, 'Please come and help me.' She'll come automatically . . . There are so many things in India culture for becoming happy and advancing towards the goal of life. Now I am appreciating for more and more, seeing the whole world, what is India's culture. Formerly I was thinking, 'It is custom. To become faithful wife, this is custom.' But when I come outside, I see what is wife and what is faithful wife. In India, still, in the village, even there is fight between husband, wife, the wife is faithful. Still. Completely dependent on husband. The husband also, in spite of fighting, he is always careful that the wife does not get any inconvenience. It was the culture; now it is breaking . . . In material world, for peaceful life there must be peaceful condition between the husband and wife . . . This is Indian civilization. Aim is spiritual

advancement. And to make condition favorable, there are so many things . . . here in the Western countries there is no favorable condition. First of all, they have no idea of spiritual life, the goal of life, neither there is favorable condition. And gradually things are becoming degrading. On my last tour in Chicago I saw. In three weeks she has twice divorced, one lady . . . Is that life? How they can be happy if this is the condition? (Conversation, Nouvelle Mayapur, France, 2 Aug 1976) Srila Prabhupada wasn't trying to turn the West into Indian villages. He had been witnessing the disintegration of relationships through divorce and was promoting an approach to family life that actually worked. He was sharing universal principles and guidelines for matrimonial harmony, for counteracting the scourge of unreasonable divorce. For instance, he said: "Husband and wife may fight, but if you don't give them any seriousness, they will mitigate. That is the process. But in the Western countries, in the name of liberty, so many family lives are dismantled simply by this divorce case." (Initiation Lecture, Sydney, 9 April 1972)

Modern research shows that divorce tend to perpetuate itself. An article in *The Atlantic*, "How Successful Are the Marriages of People With Divorced Parents?" explains:

"divorce, as a thorough body of research [101] has demonstrated, often perpetuates itself across generations—'children of divorce,' as they're called, are more likely to get divorced themselves than are people from 'intact families' . . . Nicholas Wolfinger, a sociologist at the University of Utah . . . [found that] people with divorced parents are disproportionately likely to marry other people with divorced parents—and couples in which both partners are children of divorce are more likely to get divorced than couples in which just one person is. Wolfinger says that researchers have some ideas about why divorce would be heritable. One theory[102] is that many children of divorce don't learn important lessons about commitment. 'All couples fight,' Wolfinger explains. 'If your parents stay together, they fight and then you realize these things aren't fatal to a marriage. If you're from a divorced family, you don't learn that message' . . . many couples today are probably choosing to get divorced over issues that couples in previous generations might have just chosen to live with."[103] Even more worrisome than the

[101] https://link.springer.com/article/10.2307/2648064
[102] https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/j.1741-3737.2001.01038.x
[103] https://www.theatlantic.com/family/archive/2019/05/divorced-parents-marriage/590425/

breakup of the couple is the effect on the children. The article continues: "Linda Nielsen, a professor at Wake Forest University who studies father-daughter relationships, has found[104] that the reduced presence of a father tends to harm girls' educational prospects and physical health—as well as their marriages, which are more likely to end in divorce. Nielsen says that fathers can help daughters build confidence in themselves, and that this confidence serves them well when selecting their partners. Girls who grow up 'hungry for a better and deeper relationship with their fathers,' she says, often try to satiate that hunger 'very quickly, with the first guys that come along.'" It's a vicious circle; an emotional deprivation that, to get offset, creates more trouble. This also reminds us of the scriptural injunction that fathers should protect their daughters. It's not just physical or economic protection; children need both parents to grow harmoniously.

Srila Prabhupada stressing the role of the wife as crucial in keeping the marriage together is also a recognition of the power of the woman; a power that's developed by chastity, sense of duty, commitment to the relation, and a healthy dose of tolerance. Of course, if the husband is seriously

[104] https://psycnet.apa.org/record/2012-04035-000

fallen or violently abusive, according to the scriptures she doesn't have to put up with him; but in normal circumstances, she shouldn't take the husband idiosyncrasies or irritability too seriously. And, of course, relation is a two-way street. Traditional Indian culture emphasizes that the wife's satisfaction is essential to the prosperity of the household. Here are four verses from the *Manu-samhita*: "Where women are honoured, there the gods are pleased; but where they are not honoured, no sacred rite yields rewards. Where the female relations live in grief, the family soon wholly perishes; but that family where they are not unhappy ever prospers. The houses on which female relations, not being duly honoured, pronounce a curse, perish completely, as if destroyed by magic. Hence men who seek (their own) welfare, should always honour women on holidays and festivals with (gifts of) ornaments, clothes, and (good) food." (*Manu-samhita*, 3.56-59) If this is considered sexist, so be it. Srila Prabhupada was sexist. I am sexist. Gaudiya-vaisnavism is sexist. Vedic culture is sexist. God is sexist. Everybody else can believe in their extraordinarily effective social theories. They can cherish their daydreams about gender roles, and they can keep producing broken families. They can keep robbing millions of children of the opportunity to grow

up with two parents, forcing them to face the various negative emotional and psychological consequences. Such children will be more likely to divorce themselves, and the daughters will be more likely to end up in unfruitful relationships with unworthy men. But that's not all. You can easily Google for negative effects of divorce on children, which may include anxiety, stress, mood swings, intense sadness, trust issues, hopelessness, behavioral and social problems, becoming prone to substance abuse, depression, trouble with relationships, loss of faith in marriage or family, poor education, and lower socio-economic position. Children of divorced parents are at a greater risk of developing violent and antisocial behavior, which may build into a criminal mindset. A paper on the site of the US *National Center for Biotechnology Information* states: "Nearly three decades of research evaluating the impact of family structure on the health and well-being of children demonstrates that children living with their married, biological parents consistently have better physical, emotional, and academic well-being. Pediatricians and society should promote the family structure that has the best chance of producing healthy children. The best scientific literature to date suggests that, with the exception of parents faced with unresolvable

marital violence, children fare better when parents work at maintaining the marriage. Consequently, society should make every effort to support healthy marriages and to discourage married couples from divorcing."[105] Modern scientists therefore agree with Srila Prabhupada's emphasis on the importance of keeping marriages intact; they might have different ideas on how to achieve that goal, but the conclusion is the same. Parents shouldn't be selfish and self-centered, destroying the family for remediable concerns.

Divorce - "Due to Womanly Weakness"?

A statement that at first may appear both sexist and unfair appears in a purport of the Fourth Canto *Bhagavatam*: "Generally, separation between husband and wife is due to womanly behavior; divorce takes place due to womanly weakness. The best course for a woman is to abide by the orders of her husband. That makes family life very peaceful. Sometimes there may be misunderstandings between husband and wife, as found even in such an

[105] https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4240051/

elevated family relationship as that of Satī and Lord Śiva, but a wife should not leave her husband's protection because of such a misunderstanding. If she does so, it is understood to be due to her womanly weakness." (SB 4.4.3, purport) Let's analyze. Srila Prabhupada says that in most cases ("generally") the breakup of a married couple "is due to womanly behavior." This might seem an unwarranted allegation, almost a gratuitous attack on women, but if we look more closely, we find that research data confirm Srila Prabhupada's observation. An article entitled "The Breaking Point: Why Do Women Initiate Divorce More Than Men?" on the site of *Divorce Magazine*, informs us that "A 2015 study by the American Sociological Association found that women initiate two-thirds of all divorces, a staggering 69% to be exact.[106] College-educated women initiate divorce at an even higher rate: 90%."[107] In searching for answers of why this happens, the author - Julie Danielson, a women's empowerment coach (therefore not some chauvinistic male) - suggests that, "Women crave connection, but they

[106] https://www.asanet.org/press-center/press-releases/women-more-likely-men-initiate-divorces-not-non-marital-breakups
[107] https://www.divorcemag.com/blog/why-do-women-initiate-divorce-more-than-men

don't know how to ask for it. Women seek closeness and vulnerability in a marriage where, under the veil of marriage, it is safe to be real and raw with our chosen one, or soul mate. When she reaches out for that connected feeling and is met with the 'wrong' response, she lays a brick down. Then one day, the wall is too high to penetrate it. In its simplest form, deep down, women crave connection with their partners – but many women have the erroneous belief that if their husbands *really* loved them, they would instinctively *know* what their wives wanted, so a man needs to be a proficient mind-reader to know how to satisfy their wife's need for connection . . . This is where the communication breakdown often occurs: women not saying what it is they want ('If he truly loved me, he'd already *know* what I want!'), and men not 'getting it' ('I can't do *anything* right as far as she's concerned, so I might as well stop trying!') So resentment festers and the walls go up." Here we are not talking about domestic violence or adultery. The husband may be just a regular guy who is not too romantic or emotionally bright. He might not be too proactively sensitive, but he is not an evil monster. The woman, Julie Danielson continues, starts "wondering why she is so unhappy . . . She may feel lonely, so she looks closer at the marriage. Looking at the

marriage under a microscope reveals a multitude of infractions . . . the marriage just feels empty to her as she investigates all of its faults." The author observes that usually there is a deep difference in perception between husband and wife on the solidity of the marriage: "Men think everything's fine - women think the ship is sinking fast." This seems to tally with Srila Prabhupada quite categorical verdict: "divorce takes place due to womanly weakness." Of course, we can't take Srila Prabhupada's affirmation too literally, as a universal fact. There are many factors and men certainly have their share of responsibility; but it seems that some women tend to internally amplify difficulties and catastrophize situations that are actually within the parameters of normalcy. Somewhere else in the *Bhagavatam* Srila Prabhupada writes: "In the modern day, the wife is never submissive, and therefore home life is broken even by slight incidents." (SB 9.3.10, purport) The article from *Divorce Magazine* continues, "When fixing the marriage is met with resistance or even denial, the wife starts to think that a divorce is the only way to go . . . By the time a woman says the words 'I want a divorce,' she has most likely mourned the marriage and moved on, making it too late for reconciliation. This may leave her husband pretty blind-sided." The question is: were the

shortcomings of the husband sufficient reason to disband the marriage? Obviously, husbands are not always the most perfect spouses or the most pleasant companions. They often miss many opportunities to improve the relationship: "If only he held her and asked her what she needed." the article continues, "If only he helped her a little more around the house and with the kids. If only he heard her complaints and took them seriously and made some changes. If only he did something nice for her to show his love for her . . . But what about the . . . lady whose husband really made the real effort? If only she could set aside the blackness in her heart that resentment built, scale that brick wall between them. If he could find a way to connect with her. If only..." The article ends like this, on this regretful reverberation of chances missed by both partners. Divorce is always a sad affair for all involved. I am not interested in automatically assigning the blame to the wife. Every situation has its peculiarities, but Srila Prabhupada's terse, curt pronouncements on the preponderance of the wife's responsibility - admittedly sharp and politically incorrect by contemporary standards - seem to find support in statistics and research. Professor Scott Yenor would probably agree with the idea that, "Generally, separation between husband and wife is due to

womanly behavior." (SB 4.4.3, purport) Below I am going to quote extensively from his article. I find his analysis historically insightful and psychologically compelling. His views buttress Srila Prabhupada's remarks. Prof Yenor emphasizes that making divorce legally easier gave an impetus, a pretext for women to break the marriage due to emotional unfulfillment. It provided an incentive for what Srila Prabhupada calls "womanly weakness" to fully manifest and unrestrictedly explode: "The old, fault-based approach to divorce attached men and women to family life. Women were protected when they devoted themselves to motherhood and minding the home. Society expected husbands to provide for their wives and children. With the imposition of alimony, men paid a penalty for infidelity or gross irresponsibility. The fault-based system constrained the imaginations of men and women, encouraging them to overlook low-grade conflicts for the purpose of maintaining good-enough relations. Put crudely, the old regime fostered magnanimity in men and endurance in women . . . When no-fault divorce was adopted in the early seventies, many worried that men would use their new freedom to exploit women. It was thought that bosses would leave their wives for their secretaries. But the supposed upside of no-fault divorce

was deemed greater: Women would be able to get out of abusive, neglectful relationships . . . The real outcome was otherwise. The new divorce regime reshaped the imaginations of men and women, albeit differently—which was inevitable, given the inherent differences between them. When no-fault divorce was adopted in the early seventies, no one predicted that women would file for more than two-thirds of all divorces, usually citing low-level problems such as 'basic incompatibility,' money issues, communication problems, and poor personal interaction—not physical abuse or abandonment. This feature of today's divorce culture reflects a truth about female psychology. Studies . . . show that emotions and community are more central to female than to male natures. Because women are more cooperative and eager to please than men, they take conflict more personally. Women are more emotionally demanding than men. In one study, 98 percent of wives said they were dissatisfied because their husbands did not talk enough about their feelings and thoughts . . . Wives' needs are socially reinforced, giving them confidence that their judgments are well-founded. She deserves better! Given these factors . . . it is not surprising that women have become the less stable partners in marriage . . . Under the old regime,

women were encouraged to recognize and appreciate that men are different. The Old Wisdom counseled them to turn to female friends for many of their emotional needs, while appreciating their husbands' loyalty. The new sexual constitution subordinates parenthood, duties, and procreative sexuality to companionship, emotional closeness, and personal growth. Today, emotional closeness has become the basis of a 'good marriage' . . . These changes in the legal framework and cultural norms of marital life have had profound effects . . . No one is happy in this situation . . . Legislators should propose laws that make divorce more difficult to obtain. Immediate measures, such as making fathers the default parents in custody battles, would encourage women into sobering second thoughts about filing for divorce."[108] This reminds of Srila Prabhupada's recommendation: "Sometimes there may be misunderstandings between husband and wife . . . but a wife should not leave her husband's protection because of such a misunderstanding. If she does so, it is understood to be due to her womanly weakness." (SB 4.4.3, purport) The present crisis of matrimonial stability doesn't lend itself to quick fixes. There is no silver bullet.

[108] https://www.firstthings.com/article/2021/11/sexual-counter-revolution

At the same time, facing the widespread disintegration of family life, individuals, couples and policymakers would do well to seriously consider the apparently radical, possibly counterintuitive, but plausible perspectives that Srila Prabhupada advocates. Again, Srila Prabhupada's primary focus was the spiritual emancipation and permanent happiness of everyone. He wasn't a mundane social reformer; solid marriages with no spiritual content had relative significance to him. He was certainly against divorce, but marital arrangements weren't his chief interest. At one point he made clear that he wasn't planning to get too involved, or to see ISKCON too involved:

Hari-śauri: One point now that's coming up more and more is that these married couples, the women want a divorce or get another husband.

Prabhupāda: But we should not implicate.

Hari-śauri: So we cannot encourage divorce.

Prabhupāda: No. We do not meddle matters in that way very much. That is a sideline.

(Conversation, Bhubaneswar, 21 Jan 1977)

On another occasion he again stressed his real priorities:

Prabhupāda: ISKCON is not going to be social reformer, but as far as possible, we can help. Our main business is how to make everyone Kṛṣṇa conscious. That is our business . . .

Tamāla Kṛṣṇa: If *varṇāśrama* is neglected, then how can there be proper functioning of society?

Prabhupāda: No. If the society chants Hare Kṛṣṇa seriously, then it is all right. Never mind whatever is done. It doesn't matter . . . This is the power of *hari-saṅkīrtana*.

(Morning Walk, Mayapur, 9 Feb 1976)

So, there is hope for everyone. Notwithstanding, many times Srila Prabhupada emphasized the importance of matrimonial harmony as a favorable platform for regulated life and spiritual advancement, for social sanity and for the benefit of future generations. We humbly suggest that those who find his recommendations for wives indigestible should concentrate on cultivating Krishna consciousness. The rest will come. Or not.

"Protection" - Not an Affront

When stressing the need for protecting women, Srila Prabhupada often referred to *Manu-saṁhitā* 9.3:

pitā rakṣati kaumāre bhartā rakṣati yauvane
rakṣanti sthavire putrā na strī svātantryam arhati

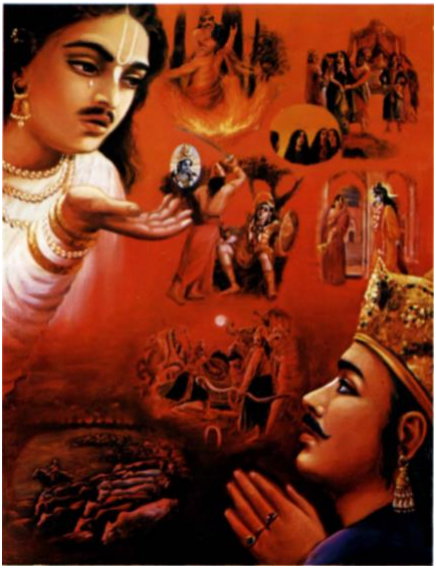
"Her father protects (her) in childhood, her husband protects (her) in youth, and her sons protect (her) in old age; a woman is never fit for independence." Unsurprisingly this verse - especially the last part - has irked many people and has been interpreted as a clear example of the misogynistic nature of Indian culture. In reality, women are valued in Vedic culture, and this verse orders men to take good care of them, never leaving them exposed to abuse and other indignities. Srila Prabhupada expands on the concept: "According to Vedic system, there is no independent life of woman. *Na strī svātantryam arhati. Manu-saṁhitā*, that '*Strī*'—*strī* means woman—'should not be allowed independence' . . . No independence means they are well protected. No independence does not mean that he has no independence to act. No. She has got. But under the protection. Just like there are some nation still now, protectorate. America is

protecting. America is a big nation; and protecting another small nation. That does not mean they have no independence. They are also independent." (Lecture on SB 2.1.2-5, Montreal, 23 Oct 1968) I find the analogy compelling. A protectorate is a state that's protected by another sovereign state without being its direct possession or its colony. A protectorate it's a dependent territory but with local autonomy over most of its internal affairs.

Once, in Mayapur, India, I attended the session entitled "Stri Dharma in the 21st Century and Beyond," by Radha Dasi Prabhu, global Minister of the *ISKCON Vaisnavi Ministry*. It was inspiring and instructive to hear her saying that while she was in Mayapur, she was being protected by her husband, who was then in California, on the other side of the world. It's not a matter of physical presence; it's the inner connection, the quality of the relationship, the mutual trust and affection that generate the experience of shelter, of feeling secure and protected. It's the sense of identity of being part of a healthy couple, being fixed in a sacred, socially irreversible union with one's husband, that provides *protection*. Besides the experience of a genuine marital bond, the spirit of protecting women, even physically speaking, is natural in any civilized society: "So

suppose in this Hawaii city, in Honolulu city," Srila Prabhupada says, "you understand that some cannibals have come; they are taking away human being for eating. Then what is your concern immediately? Immediately concern will be, if you are at all actually responsible, then the immediate concern will be *stri̇ya urvi bālān*: to give protection to the weaker section of the population, namely the women and the children." (Lecture on SB 1.16.21, Honolulu, 17 Jan 1974) Who can argue with that? Plus, Vedic culture mandates protection for various classes of beings, not only women: "According to Vedic civilization, everyone has the responsibility for taking care of *brāhmaṇas*, old men, women, children and cows. This is the duty of everyone, especially an upper-class person." (SB 6.2.28, purport) Men also need protection if they are elderly, sick or if they are *brāhmaṇas* - even if young and healthy. It's not insulting to consider that someone deserves protection if even *brāhmaṇas*, the heads of society, require protection. The *Bhagavatam* offers another glimpse on the importance of protection. Coming back from Dvaraka, Arjuna appears extraordinarily dejected. Maharaja Yudhisthira, trying to discern the cause of his gloom, asks various questions. For instance, he inquires: "You are always the protector of the deserving living

beings, such as *brāhmaṇas,* children, cows, women and the diseased. Could you not give them protection when they approached you for shelter?" (SB 1.14.41) The idea was that for a *ksatriya* like Arjuna to fail to protect the needy, the weaker, would have been greatly humiliating. In the next chapter, Arjuna tells Yudhisthira the reason of his anguish: "O Emperor, now I am separated from my friend and dearmost well-wisher, the Supreme Personality of Godhead, and therefore my heart appears to be void of everything. In His absence I have been defeated by a number of infidel cowherd men while I was guarding the bodies of all the wives of Kṛṣṇa." (SB 1.15.20)



Arjuna, talking with Yudhisthira, remembers Krishna. Srila Prabhupada says: "Arjuna was so great hero. Still, he required protection."

Srila Prabhupada lectures on the verse, elaborating on the need for protection - for women and for everyone else: "Woman requires protection.

According to Vedic culture, woman has no independence. Because they cannot keep their independence . . . By nature, they are weak. So they require protection . . . Otherwise, *abaleva*, they can be victimized by any man, powerful, because man is powerful . . . We also require. Don't be proud, 'Because I am man, I don't require protection.' Here it is said . . . Arjuna said, *puruṣottamena so 'haṁ rahitaḥ:* 'Now I have no protection.' Arjuna was so great hero. Still, he required protection." (Lecture on SB 1.15.20, Los Angeles, 30 Nov 1973) Intelligent women shouldn't feel slighted if Srila Prabhupada does his best to prevent their being injured, abused, or harassed. To think, "No, I can do it all by myself" might be nourishing to the ego but may not be the best option.

Different Anthropological Levels, Different Tunes

Srila Prabhupada spoke on different anthropological levels. On a physical level he might have stressed the difference between man and woman, advocating the need for the woman's dependence on the man. It's a fact that pregnancy and childcare limit a woman's free movement

and puts her in the vulnerable condition of being dependent on the help of others, at least temporarily: "First of all show that you [have] equal rights—your husband becomes sometimes pregnant and then you become pregnant, alternately." (Morning Walk, Vrindavana, 10 Dec 1975) Srila Prabhupada here describes the physical plane, the nature of the body. The wife can't suggest that the husband become pregnant and breastfeed the child. No *equal rights* in that area. When speaking on a higher level, the spiritual plane, Srila Prabhupada recognizes the "equal rights" of men and women: "For God there is no discrimination. Women, men have equal rights to become godly and back to home, back to Godhead." (Lecture on SB 5.5.2, Johannesburg, 22 Oct 1975) Equal opportunity is there, therefore, for spiritual life. He also spoke similarly about men and women having equal rights in his institution, the International Society for Krishna Consciousness:

Mrs. O'Connell: Swāmījī, would you say something about the place of women in your movement?
Prabhupāda: There is no distinction between man and woman . . . in the spiritual platform there is no such distinction, man, woman, or black, white, or big or small.

No. Everyone is spirit soul . . . But so far our material body is concerned, there must be some distinction for keeping the society in order . . . There are so many Western woman, girls, in our society . . . Many. Of course, because superficially, bodily, there is some distinction, so we keep women separately from men, that's all. Otherwise, the rights are the same."
(Interview with Professors O'Connell, Motilal and Shivaram, Toronto, 18 June 1976)

Unless we clearly identify what anthropological level Srila Prabhupada was addressing, we may become perplexed.

The Need to Look Deeper

I freely admit: it can be challenging to grasp the essence of Srila Prabhupada position on gender and social themes within the colossal assortment of his statements. He might use the same expression - such as, say, "equal rights" - with different meanings. It's easy for the uninformed to lock themselves in one of two binary options. Was he for or against *equal rights*? It depends on the angle, the perspective he was focusing on. It also depends on what specific rights we are talking about. For instance, I have

never heard Srila Prabhupada speaking against the right of women to vote in political elections. Of course, a large swathe of contemporary public may brand him as sexist just because he said that, on the purely physical level, women aren't equal to men. At the Olympic Games men can't compete in the women's events and vice versa; are the organizers incorrigible sexists? Are they fiercely against equal rights? Women, on average, have smaller bodies; is the Universe sexist?

Books could be written - and probably will be written - contrasting apparently contradictory or even diametrically opposed statements Srila Prabhupada made on various topics. Devotees sometimes remain bewildered: is he merely portraying a custom from previous ages as a cultural, historical reference or was he recommending the implementation of that practice? He was often *describing* things that he never dreamt of *prescribing*. In some case we need to ask ourselves: was he talking about an inaccessible golden past, about a viable present, or, perhaps, a desirable future? Also, to what extent what he might have circumstantially advised fifty years ago remains relevant now? And in another fifty or five-hundred years? Laws change, people change in their values and

perceptions... We need to endeavor sincerely and intelligently to distinguish permanent principles from conditional details. In offering social guidelines Srila Prabhupada was flexible; even creative. He told us to consider the situation, the local laws, the people involved, their habits, their upbringing, their capacity, their willingness, and their smarts. Monarchy? Great institution, but only when run by the right people - noble, wise kings - otherwise don't bother about it; democracy would do. Early marriages for girls? Sure - but if the men are irresponsible or exploitative, or the state bans it, just forget about it. Polygamy? In principle a respectable practice - but if it's illegal or if couples can't even keep a monogamous marriage together... never mind. *Sati* rite, the self-immolation of widows in the husband's funeral pyre? I don't think so. There is ideal and there is real. Srila Prabhupada often spoke about what he envisioned as the highest, superlative standards; but if he observed that those lofty canons were impracticable, he would readily settle for something more manageable. And this may cause confusion: "But he said *that!"* (Whatever "that" may be) "Yes, but 'that' wasn't for you; not in this lifetime. Let it go." I have seen naive, literalistic readings by both casual web surfers and by some Srila Prabhupada's staunch but

simpler followers. Both isolate certain social statements from their larger context, taking them as absolute representations of Srila Prabhupada's thinking. Instead those statements were simply partial, relative perspectives within a broader presentation.

Srila Prabhupada had no illusion that he could re-establish the full Vedic paradigm in the present, disturbed age. Notwithstanding, he did want that his followers apply as much as possible the principles of sane, healthy living - physical, emotional, intellectual and spiritual healthy living. He did envision wives acting as assistants to their husbands, with the husbands behaving as benevolent protectors and caring guides. Srila Prabhupada was appalled and aggrieved in seeing girls giving themselves away to underserving, exploitative and casual partners; girls becoming trapped by unwanted pregnancies and resorting to killing the baby or to begging assistance from the government. He wanted women to be protected from unscrupulous men. Srila Prabhupada recognized women's innocent, trusting nature: "They [women] have no crooked mind. Sometimes they are exploited, therefore." (Lecture on SB 1.2.6, Montreal, 3 Aug 1968) He wanted his disciples to leave peacefully and faithfully as husbands

and wives and recognized that the male ego generally demands a superior position, and that the wife would have to consider that mentality for the sake of the marriage (and if she wishes to influence the husband). He was aware that children need both parents to grow harmoniously. Somehow his acknowledgement of the different psychological outlooks and his exhortation at harmony through the wife's adjustment and tolerance have been taken as reactionary; but, in the right circumstances (when men are generous protectors and providers) it's the best arrangement for everyone involved. What's the alternative? Families breaking left and right; children growing up in single-parent homes (not good!); constant matrimonial conflicts for supremacy... I think it's time the world humbly and honestly takes notice of the "Old Wisdom."

Srila Prabhupada's motivation was to benefit everyone - man or woman - by recommending a lifestyle conducive to Krishna consciousness. He was perfectly aware that all embodied souls suffer the pains of birth, death, old age, and disease - as well as the plethora of other sufferings such as fear (in its millions of expressions and degrees of intensity), hunger, thirst, heat, cold, etc.

Srila Prabhupada freely distributed the reliable and radical solution to all problems: *bhakti-yoga*, devotional service to the Supreme Lord. He wrote: "So far your question regarding women, I have always accepted the service of women without any discrimination." (Letter to Gurudasa, 26 May 1972)

As far as the social policies he suggested, Srila Prabhupada favored the traditional approach to gender roles while allowing adjustments based on regional considerations. For instance, at one point, in the early days of ISKCON in America, a small situation arose. The issue was that in the traveling chanting party, *saṅkīrtana*, some devotees were

married and some not. Unmarried young men and young women living in close association would create some sort of distraction and sexual tension, and there was an allegation that the leadership had virtually forced a girl to marry someone if she wanted to remain in the traveling party.

The subject was brought up to Srila Prabhupada and he patiently explained the difference between Indian and Western cultures (you can hear the whole exchange here).[109] In India (at least at that time) people were accustomed to obeying their parents, marry whom the parents chose, and then stick to that marriage, no matter what. But neither imposing a partner, nor forcing people to get married was feasible in America. While quoting Sanskrit stanzas and sharing his personal experiences, Srila Prabhupada shows great flexibility and tact. He shares on the principles and the tradition while simultaneously remaining open to different solutions:

Prabhupāda: Marriage problem, one must have a choice. So if we force something, that is not (chuckling) good. At least, in your country it is not... of course, in your country

[109] https://vanisource.org/wiki/680924_-_Conversation_-_Seattle

and our country, all the boys and girls are, I mean to say, not major, whatever the parents force, that is another thing. When the boys and girls are grown up, it is not possible. Just like in India, there was *svayaṁvara. Svayaṁvara* means the girl will select her own bridegroom. That was allowed to princess . . . Otherwise, generally, the parents would select. We are married. Whatever our parents selected, we accepted. I did not like my wife, (laughs) but gradually, I was accustomed. I was obliged to like. That's all. (laughs) That is the Indian system. You like or not like, you have to accept it. That's all. The psychology is that the girls, generally, before attaining puberty if she loves one boy, she cannot forget him. That is her psychology. And a boy also, when he is grown up, the first girl he makes choice, he also cannot forget. Therefore, by some way or other they are mixed up. So in your country the situation is different. You see? . . . So we cannot enforce, at least, at the present moment. If some boy and some girl agree, then I bless him. That's all . . . if somebody agrees to marry, oh, that is welcome. There is no objection. Marriage is allowed . . . So if the boy and girl agrees to marry, it is very nice. There is no objection. If not, they should be given all protection. Is that all right?

Tamāla Kṛṣṇa: Yes. That's how it should be. It is just very difficult . . . to travel with these women . . . So that's what I told her. It's very difficult to have *brahmacārī* and *brahmacārīṇis* all the time together.

Prabhupāda: No. This is not possible. Because *brahmacārīs*, they are young men, and they are young girls. Naturally, there is disturbance to the mind. Yes. It is just like putting butter pot on fire . . . Fire is a woman, and man is just like butter pot, it is said. Therefore they should not keep together. (laughs) . . . how she can travel with you? She has no husband.

Tamāla Kṛṣṇa: No. So what do you think? Is it all right for her to travel with us, or better not to?

Prabhupāda: Because she has no husband.

Tamāla Kṛṣṇa: No.

Prabhupāda: Therefore it does not look very nice.

Tamāla Kṛṣṇa: Doesn't look right.

Prabhupāda: But in your country there are so many concessions. That is a different thing. But at least, in India, no. (laughs) In your country there cannot be any such restriction. In that way, she can go . . .

Tamāla Kṛṣṇa: Yes. I'm not worried so much how it looks in this country. What I'm worried about is the mixing. But

people don't care. The public does not mind . . . It was suggested that she get married, and . . . she said no . . . the only reason she could say no, because material reason. Not spiritual reason. She said no because of her preference, material preference.

Prabhupāda: Of course, so long we have got this material body, some material consideration must be there. (chuckles) That is not possible to avoid completely.

Devotee: They shouldn't force her to get married, though. That was kind of a bad choice that they gave her, "Either get married or don't come on *saṅkīrtana*." You can't force somebody.

Tamāla Kṛṣṇa: No, that wasn't the situation. It was not that choice . . .

Devotee: You can't force somebody to get married. You know? That isn't proper.

Prabhupāda: There was no force. There was no force. Only proposal. That's all. When it was proposed before me, I also said, "It depends on the choice." So anyway, go on with your work, *saṅkīrtana* movement you have started . . . If some girl want to go, then she may marry somebody. That will be nice. Of course, in your country there is no such restriction if unmarried girls go with you. But if she

is married, that is better. So you make your choice in that way. So she is going, this girl?

Tamāla Kṛṣṇa: Śrīmatī?

Prabhupāda: Śrīmatī?

Tamāla Kṛṣṇa: Yes. She wishes to go. I asked her, I told her, "So you have to get married." And she just said: "Oh, I have been married. I just want to marry Kṛṣṇa now."

Prabhupāda: (laughs) That's nice. That is very nice. Yes. If one gets Kṛṣṇa actually, he or she forgets everything. That is sure.

(Conversation, Seattle, 24 Sept 1968)

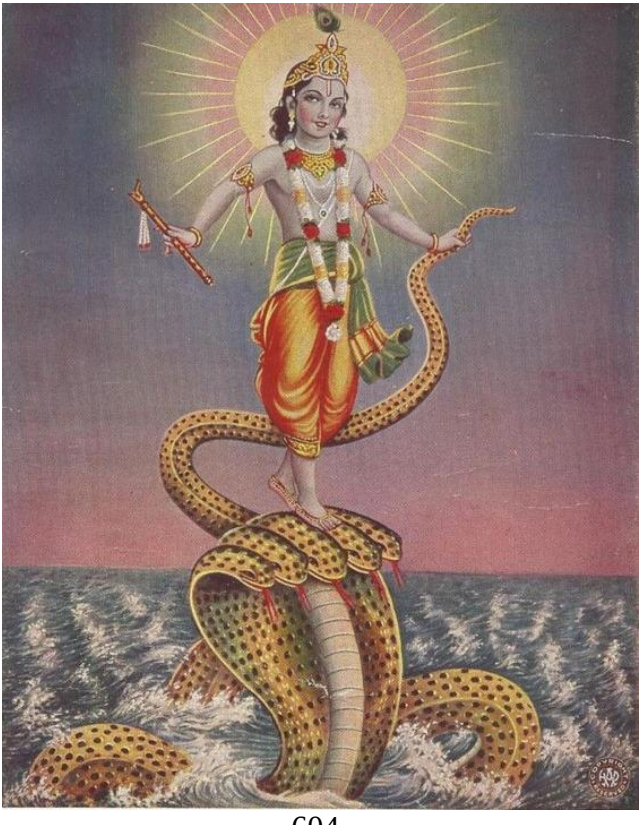
It again becomes clear that we can't understand Srila Prabhupada - the real Srila Prabhupada - if we isolate single statements from the totality of his teachings. It's so frustrating to witness someone taking one sentence out of the broader context and building an estimate of Srila Prabhupada exclusively on that sentence. This happens to both critics and admirers. The superficial detractor says, "He said those words; that's what he thinks; that's what *he is*. We should reject him." The simple-minded (or narrow-minded) ISKCON devotee says, "He said those words; that's what he thinks; that's what *he is*. We should blindly

follow those words." Both are wrong. Both miss the full picture, to the detriment or their comprehension and to the loss of Srila Prabhupada's movement.

To conclude: some of the things Srila Prabhupada said certainly *sound* as sexist, stereotyping women in a negative way. Some of the statements can be explained by their context; others can be considered descriptions of Vedic cultural standards suitable for people of other times or as ideals to gradually strive for. Other statements may not be readily justified in the *literal form* they were presented. These can be taken as hyperbolic pronouncements; as informal generalizations; as due to inaccurate information he received; as expressions of Srila Prabhupada's daring, fiery and defiant style; or as unhappy choices of words. Srila Prabhupada's views on the nature of the genders are often corroborated by contemporary conservative intellectuals as well as by scholarly sociological and psychological studies, but some of his usages of language remain highly equivocal. Members of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness, in the mood of service to the Founder-*Acarya,* should carefully distinguish what can be circulated for public consumption and what's best to keep as intimate references (which, in some cases, they

were meant to be). We need to confront the fact: Srila Prabhupada may have innocently used words and notions (which he inherited from his cultural background) that weren't problematic during his time. The word "Negro," for instance, had no negative connotation during most of his life. Today such expressions, in their present dictionary definition, can disturb a lot of people and can create significant hurdles to the propagation of Krishna consciousness. Times change, language changes, the capacity of the public to accept or digest information changes, and we should follow in Srila Prabhupada's compassionate footsteps, endeavoring to help people get the essential message without challenging them with (non-essential) notions they are neither ready nor able to assimilate. And this careful approach is particularly applicable to social aspects that are not truly essential for people's acceptance of Krishna consciousness. "A devotee may act as an ordinary human being or as a strict follower of Vedic injunctions. In either case, everything he does is favorable for the advancement of devotional service because he is in Kṛṣṇa consciousness." (*Cc Antya*-lila, 16.241, purport) Krishna is attractive for everyone. Even the serpent Kāliya acknowledged His dazzling beauty. When Krishna entered the serpent's lake, "Kāliya saw

that Kṛṣṇa was indeed worth seeing because His body was so beautiful and delicate; its color resembled that of a cloud, and His feet resembled lotus flowers. He was decorated with Śrīvatsa, jewels and yellow garments. He was smiling with a beautiful face and playing in the river Yamunā with great strength." (*Kṛṣṇa Book*, Ch. 16)



Everyone is looking for Krishna, although they might not (yet) look for all the social practices that were normal in India when Krishna was present. We shouldn't unnecessarily create obstacles to people's acceptance of Krishna consciousness by promoting social practices that are very far from their background and present culture. Slowly, gradually, they may come to appreciate the desirability of such practices, but we should not shove these traditional customs down their throats. "So this is Kṛṣṇa consciousness. Try to understand Kṛṣṇa consciousness. Simply by practicing this, some way or other, you become attached to Kṛṣṇa . . .

yena tena prakāreṇa
manaḥ kṛṣṇe niveśayet
sarve vidhi-niṣedhāḥ syur
etayor eva kiṅkarāḥ

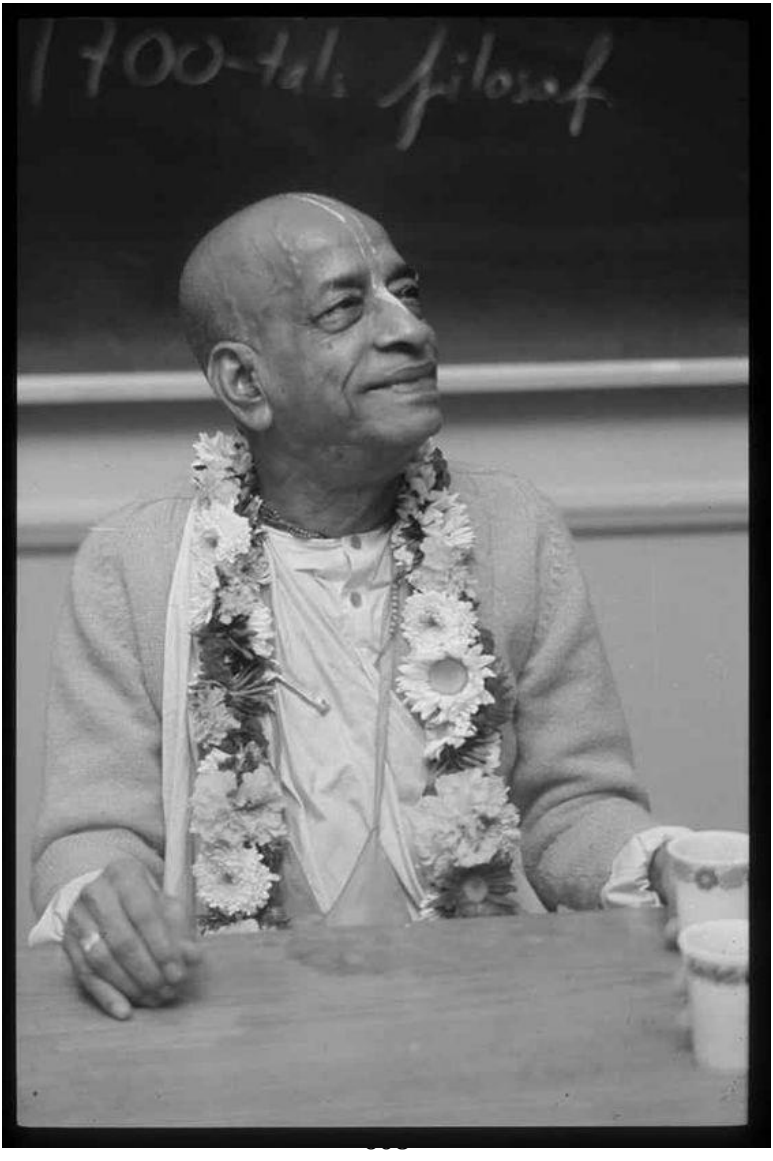
(*Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu* 1.2.4) . . . I am just introducing one after another, little by little, but those who are practicing this Kṛṣṇa consciousness in India, there are so many rules and regulation. Somebody says that 'Swāmījī is very conservative. He has got so many rules and regulation,' but I have not even introduced one percent. One percent. Because it is not possible to introduce all

those rules and regulation in your country. My policy is following the footstep of Rūpa Gosvāmī. He said just somehow or other, let them become first of all attached to Kṛṣṇa. That is my policy. And rules and regulation, they will do it later on. First of all let him be attached to Kṛṣṇa." (Lecture on Bg 7.1, Los Angeles, 2 Dec 1968)

6. Conclusion

If you read everything so far, my gratitude to you. I hope you consider the time, the intellectual and emotional energy you dedicated to this book a worthy investment. This book will almost certainly be branded as blasphemous by some (especially by some who won't read it). I expect that some will label it as sacrilegious. I wouldn't be surprised to hear exhortations to burn at the stake both the book and its author. (Burning its electronic copies would present a major logistic challenge; the author, while embodied, remains more easily flammable.)

I chose to focus on addressing issues connected with racism, sexism and homophobia, but, for comprehensiveness' sake, I should mention that there are other types of "controversial statements" - for instance in the field of science - that this book doesn't address. So far, this has been my most difficult writing project because it involved various moral dilemmas and issues of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balance. Now that it's over, the same questions remain. Will the devotees who had been disturbed by certain comments by Srila Prabhupada on gender, race or sexual orientation feel somewhat relieved - their pain and doubts somewhat mitigated - after reading this book? Or, instead, have I been instrumental in sharing additional references - of which they were not aware - which will perturb them even more? Did I accurately portray the framework or the intent of certain expressions? Did I lean too much toward a *defensive* approach at the cost of objectivity? Or, on the contrary, was I too straightforward, direct, or even rude in pointing out the inaccuracy of certain assertions? Would readers take this work as an attempt at whitewash, or would they consider it an honest effort at offering background and context? Some of these doubts might be partially clarified by the feedback I will receive (you can write me at kaunteya.jps@iskcon.net). In one sense it's like building an airplane; you won't exactly know how well it will fly until you finish constructing it and test it in the sky.

So, summarizing, as far as racism, yes, Srila Prabhupada made some unflattering remarks about Blacks and other groups. I believe that even if, for argument's sake, he had

any adverse disposition toward people of African ancestry, he more than compensated for it by giving access to his movement to everyone, by traveling multiple times to Africa, by treating all with respect and benevolence in personal dealings, and by offering opportunities to everyone, from any ethnic group, for leadership and responsibility in his mission. He knew perfectly well - and in fact he taught it to the whole world - that skin color or other physical features have nothing to do with the true identity of the self. If at times he employed some generalizations, I suggest people shouldn't take them too personally, because, in action, Srila Prabhupada demonstrated great liberality and inclusivity, great integrity in welcoming everyone: "Although in material consideration, according to the body, there is distinction, in the spiritual platform there is no such distinction. Kṛṣṇa therefore says in the *Bhagavad-gītā, māṁ hi pārtha vyapāśritya ye 'pi syuḥ pāpa-yonayaḥ* (Bg 9.32). Anyone, it does not matter in which family he belongs to, if he takes shelter unto the lotus feet of the Supreme Personality of Godhead, never mind what he is—he may be a man, he may be a woman, he may be a *śūdra*, he may be a *brahmin* or he may be black or he may be white—everyone can approach to the highest platform of

devotional service. It is open field." (Lecture on SB 7.9.12, Montreal, 19 Aug 1968) And he personally opened the door to this "open field" to everyone, on every continent.

As far as homophobia, yes, Srila Prabhupada made some pointed remarks on homosexuality, but let's remember that he made cutting remarks on virtually everything. That was his style. He called male homosexual attraction "an aptitude of the demons," but he also called so many other things (including heterosexual allure and non-devotional music) as demoniac. His words may appear stern and inflexible, but he dealt with gay devotees cordially and affectionately, always welcoming them and facilitating their engagement in devotional service. It seems that, from the mundane point of view, Srila Prabhupada wasn't too conversant with all the complexities of sexuality that were studied more in depth in later years. His perceptions appear aligned with ideas common in the environment he grew up in and with the scientific assessments of his time - now considered antiquated by the same agencies that expressed them. Same-sex marriage started becoming legalized decades after his demise. I believe that, had Srila Prabhupada been present now, he would be more

amenable to the idea of gay marriage, or, at the very least, to the option of civil unions. I can't prove it, but, on the other hand, no one can disprove it either.

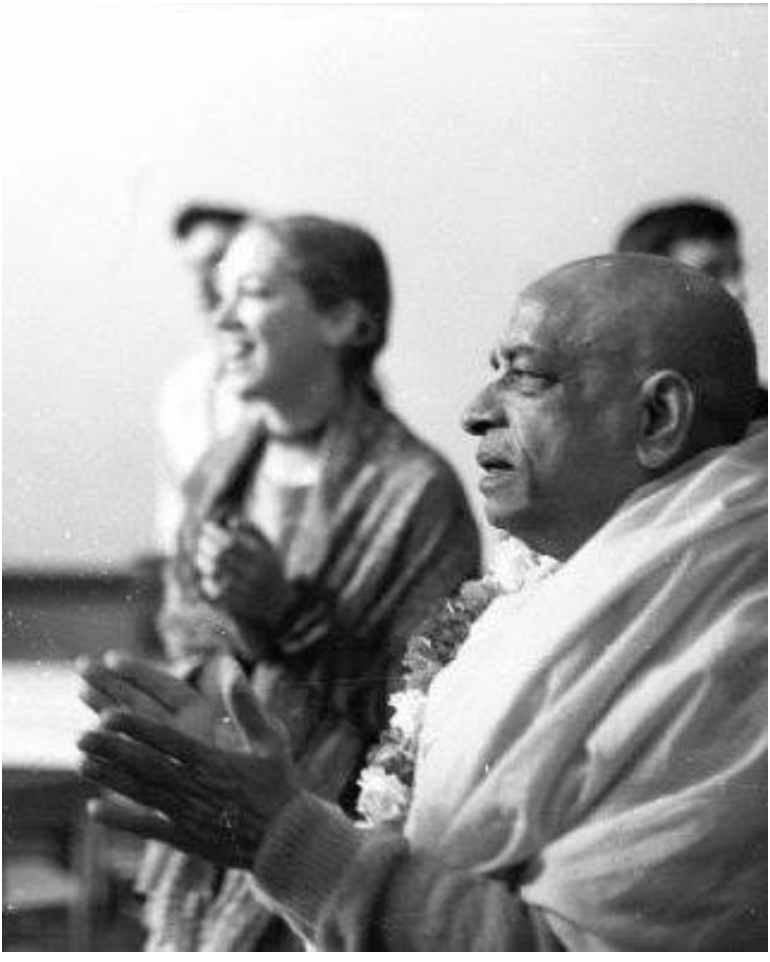
As far as sexism, yes, he made some derogatory comments on women's brain and intellectual capacity, also based on wrong information he received in college. His vision of the role of the genders was in line with traditional and scriptural views; in line with a culture that deeply valued the protection of women, a culture effective in keeping marriages intact and in rearing healthy progeny. He was perfectly aware that he couldn't just import all norms and practices from the Vedic age into the modern times. Therefore some of what he spoke

should be taken more as *descriptions* (aspirational, inspirational and directional portrayals) than *prescriptions* (firm instructions to be strictly followed by twentieth and twenty-first century people). His dealings with women were sweet, fatherly (or grandfatherly), protective and empowering - as the many testimonials from his lady disciples certify. Ultimately, besides perusing excerpts from this or that book or extracts from this or that conversation, we should hear from those women who personally knew Srila Prabhupada. They, and they only, can speak in the first person on how they felt treated by him. Over 300 Srila Prabhupada's lady disciples contributed their memories to the book *A Bond of Love - Srila Prabhupada and His Daughters*. Here I only include a few examples of their sharings. Kausalya Devi Prabhu: "Srila Prabhupada empowered his daughters in the same way that he empowered everyone. He didn't make a distinction. In all of the many times that I spent with Srila Prabhupada, at no point did I feel that he saw me as a woman. Prabhupada saw us all as spirit souls." Dinatarini Devi Prabhu: "Seeing how Prabhupada acted with and treated women showed me clearly that Srila Prabhupada didn't make distinctions based on body but rather based on the sincerity of the soul who was coming forward. He

engaged and encouraged and loved his women disciples in a powerful and real way." Sudharma Devi Prabhu: "[Srila Prabhupada] was somewhat unaffected by everything around him, even the wind... Then he spoke, and I remember him saying, 'You are not the body.' I could see that this was right, and that he was realized and that he was living it."[110] He knew perfectly that we are neither men nor women, but souls encapsulated in temporary physical bodies. He wanted his lady followers to serve the mission in the best way they could, including by becoming spiritual masters and initiating their own disciples. In terms of gender roles, he seemed to juggle *ideal* and *real* - customs from the past (beneficial but not always easy to implement), contemporary standards, modern cultural models, Vedic ideas, legislative ground realities and individual conditionings. But he certainly deserves to be considered the person who did the most in the world - at least in the twentieth century - for the true emancipation and the ultimate liberation of women. In fact, for many of Srila Prabhupada's followers, this book may have no use at all. Because they know, in the depth of their being, that behind and beyond whatever

[110] https://www.amazon.in/Bond-Love-Srila-Prabhupada-Daughters-ebook/dp/B08DP4Y8F5

he might have said that sounds contentious, his intention was pure and his compassion oceanic.



Martin Luther & Srila Prabhupada

Martin Luther (1483-1546) was a seminal figure within the Reformation, the movement that rejected the authority of the pope, split from the Roman Catholic Church, and originated various Protestant denominations. Today, approximately one out of every eight people on the planet is Protestant. As an author, Luther was the most widely read of his generation; and within Germany he gained the status of a prophet. But some of his statements remain divisive, others, by modern standards, plainly unforgivable. Professor of church history Herman Selderhuis, in his article *Martin Luther's Controversial View of Women*, writes: "Luther said things about women you can laugh about, but that were in fact sad. He'd say that the Creator made women to have broad hips so that they could sit down in the home . . . Luther asks why girls mature more quickly than boys. He comments that the

Martin Luther

answer is simple - weeds grow faster than roses. I have four daughters. Needless to say, they don't like hearing from Luther so much anymore." Even more problematic are his antisemitic views: "Luther wrote negatively about the Jews throughout his career." a *Wikipedia* article explains, "Though Luther rarely encountered Jews during his life, his attitudes reflected a theological and cultural tradition which saw Jews as a rejected people guilty of the murder of Christ . . . He considered the Jews blasphemers and liars because they rejected the divinity of Jesus . . . Luther argues that the Jews were no longer the chosen people but 'the devil's people', and refers to them with violent language . . . Luther advocates setting synagogues on fire, destroying Jewish prayerbooks, forbidding rabbis from preaching, seizing Jews' property and money, and smashing up their homes . . . In Robert Michael's view, Luther's words 'We are at fault in not slaying them' amounted to a sanction for murder."[111] Through the centuries, Luther's original Church and other groups inspired by his teachings kept splintering; to the point that today some 47,000 Protestant denominations exist. Some of these - especially the Lutheran ones, which carry his name - have formally

[111] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Martin_Luther

repudiated Luther's attacks on the Jews. Although all branches and sub-branches descending from the Reformation possess an historical connection with Martin Luther, in most cases it's a remote relationship. Therefore, although Luther could be taken as their ancestral originator, his disreputable assertions do not really affect contemporary Protestant institutions. In ISKCON, the status of the Founder-*Acarya*'s statements is drastically different. Srila Prabhupada's role and presence is immensely more current and influential in ISKCON than Martin Luther's position is in today's Protestantism. Protestants don't offer daily worship to their founder; but we do. Protestants don't see their founder as their "preeminent *siksa-guru*"; but we do. Protestants don't consider their founder a "*saktyavesa-avatara*"; but we do. Protestants don't primarily study their founder's books, lectures, and letters; but we do. When Protestants argue a point, they don't refer primarily to the words of their founder; but we do. Protestants don't place a *murti* of their founder in all their churches or his picture on all their altars; but we do. I could go on, but you get the idea: Srila Prabhupada "controversial statements" can affect ISKCON much more than Luther's words can hurt his Protestant descendants. Of course, it must be said that Srila

Prabhupada never said something comparable to calling the Jews 'the devil's people' or urging to set their synagogues on fire, or likening girls to weeds. Nonetheless, even affirmations that are very mild in comparison to what Luther said can severely agitate the modern minds. Luther has the "advantage" of being situated centuries in the past. He started the Reformation some 506 years ago, while Srila Prabhupada started ISKCON 57 years ago. We know how Luther is seen by Protestants now, but we don't know how Srila Prabhupada will be seen by ISKCON's followers in 450 years. As the English saying goes, "time will tell." At present we may individually and institutionally feel comfortable in the cocoon of our insular estimate of our Founder-*Acarya*, some of us oblivious or impervious to what the world thinks of him; but neglecting his public reputation can be a major disservice to him and to his mission. The world is looking; we can't just ignore the whole planet, the field of our service. Moving forward requires taking an impassionate, hard look at Srila Prabhupada's contentious statements for what they are and for how they are perceived, and then decide what to do with them. Do we truly agree with them and wish to defend them? Or do we disagree with them and therefore we dissociate from them?

What's the Use? What's the Gain?

Now, at the very end of this writing, I feel more as a follower of His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada than I felt at the beginning of the project. Notwithstanding whatever personal allegiance I might feel in the heart, I believe the International Society for Krishna Consciousness should firmly distance itself from certain things he said. We should also not imitate his way of saying them. For instance, we shouldn't try to mechanically duplicate his penchant for sweeping generalizations, which, when taken out of context, can create a lot of antagonism and confusion. Blind following in the form of repeating verbatim all that Srila Prabhupada ever said won't satisfy him if it causes a decrease of effectiveness in his mission. He would be very unhappy in seeing his own words repelling potential devotees. And I am certain he wouldn't approve of the indiscriminate publication and distribution of all that was said in private conversations.

Today, some of the things he said remain totally indigestible for hundreds of millions of people. Instead of mindlessly repeating those hazardous sentences, we

should follow his advice in the *Bhagavad-gita*: "One should not speak in such a way as to agitate the minds of others." (Bg 17.15, purport) Let's face it: some of what he said or wrote does "agitate the mind of others." I am not talking about theological truths - which may or may not be appreciated but which shouldn't be tweaked. Some might not like the idea that God is a blue boy playing the flute and tending cows, but there isn't much we can do about it. I am talking about expressions that clash with modern sensitivities but are not an integral or essential part of the Krishna conscious message. What's the benefit, today, of circulating a sentence like: "According to Cāṇakya Paṇḍita, women are generally not very intelligent and therefore not trustworthy"? (Bg 1.40, purport) First of all, without defining intelligence in a lucid, intelligible way, the phrase remains enigmatic. Second, can we really insist that, on average, women are less trustworthy than men? In what sense? In what field? Generally trusting someone depends on that person' character and/or competency. Do we really believe that women's character and/or competency are always inferior to men? Can we prove it statistically or scientifically? We can't back up such assertions with undisputable facts, without resorting to convolute explanations people have

neither the time nor the taste for. Why should we risk alienating a huge portion of human society with a sentence that it's not essential for their spiritual life? Even if, for argument's sake, we could substantiate that "women are generally not very intelligent and therefore not trustworthy," do we really need to say it at the beginning of our most important book? That sentence - and similar ones - has a poisonous, radioactive effect on our outreach. Even if the sentence is true - according to unconventional definitions - does it have to be publicly broadcasted? Does attributing it to Cāṇakya Paṇḍita make any difference for most people, people who have no idea of who Cāṇakya Paṇḍita was, where he lived, when he lived, what he believed or what he looked like? Srila Prabhupada explained to a disciple: "one should always speak the truth, but qualified devotee will be able to speak the truth always very palatable to everyone so that it will sound pleasing even to his enemy, that is the art of speaking truth. It is certainly so that we must speak the truth to all people, but how you say it that is another thing," (Letter to Yajnesvara, 2 Jan 1972) So, I hope Krishna will give us the intelligence to see which among Srila Prabhupada' statements are suitable for public consumption and which should remain as private,

historical references. I have no doubt that if today his disciples were to sit with Srila Prabhupada and explained to him how much damage can be caused by a sentence like, "women are generally not very intelligent and therefore not trustworthy," he would immediately agree to edit or remove it. Same for many other statements.

Learning from the "Vallabhacarya Affair"

We should learn from how Srila Prabhupada dealt with comparable circumstances. For instance, once he wrote to a disciple serving at the *Back to Godhead* magazine (BTG): "By the way, there has been some disturbance created by the publishing of a few comments on Vallabhacarya in Back to Godhead Vol. 10, No. 8, page 5, column 3, paragraph 2. Kindly avoid comments such as these in future publications." (Letter to Jagannatha-suta, 28 Aug 1976) What comments did they publish that should be avoided "in future publications"? It turns out that the article in question was: "What is a Guru? by His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada." It was an edited transcription of a lecture Srila Prabhupada

had given in London a couple of years before, in 1973. Srila Prabhupada had told how Lord Caitanya criticized Vallabhācārya for having praised his own *Bhagavatam* commentary as superior to the one of Śrīdhara Svāmī, a standard, authoritative reference for subsequent Vaisnava commentators. Employing a play of words - Svāmī means also "husband" - Lord Caitanya had reprimanded Vallabhācārya as unchaste. Srila Prabhupada didn't narrate the event within a private conversation or an intimate morning walk; it was a lecture open to the public. In fact, at the beginning of the speech a devotee had announced: "Ladies and gentlemen, I know for most of you this is your first appearance here at Bhaktivedanta Manor. I'd like to extend this welcome to you." This is what Srila Prabhupada said: "Caitanya Mahāprabhu . . . sarcastically remarked, the word *svāmī*, Śrīdhara Svāmī, Svāmī, another *svāmī* means 'husband.' So He said, *svāmī jīva nahi mane besa bali guni*: 'I think one who does not recognize *svāmī,* he's a prostitute.' He immediately said: 'You do not recognize Śrīdhara Svāmī, then you are a prostitute. How can I hear from a prostitute?'" (Lecture, London, 22 Aug 1973) The BTG published Srila Prabhupada's words, lightly edited for clarity. It's an almost verbatim transcription. Three times Srila

Prabhupada says "prostitute" (the most sensitive expression) and all three were just kept: "Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu sarcastically used the word *svami*, which also means husband. He said, 'I think that one who does not recognize the *svami* [husband] is a prostitute.' In other words, 'If you do not recognize Sridhara Svami, then you are a prostitute. How can I hear from a prostitute?'" (*Back to Godhead* magazine, Vol. 10, No. 8, 1975) The article had created disturbance within the large community of Vallabhācārya's followers, which included Sumati Morarjee, owner of the *Scindia Steam Navigation Company*, the lady who had provided Srila Prabhupada a free passage to America by ship. He wrote her: "I am sorry to learn that you have become a little agitated regarding the publication of an article in our Back to Godhead magazine. It is certainly unpleasant, but the officers who publish the magazine do not know *satyam bruyat priyam bruyat*, in this material world only palatable truth should be spoken. Unpalatable truth should be carefully avoided." (Letter to Sumati Morarjee, 9 Aug 1976) What was the fault of the BTG editors? They had simply published what Srila Prabhupada had spoken in an open lecture. In fact, the same episode had been reported also in *Caitanya-caritamrita* (*Antya-lila*, Ch. 7);

but Srila Prabhupada wanted that in the future the BTG editors would avoid unnecessarily agitating the public. Today, 47 years later, even if Srila Prabhupada is not there to write us letters saying: "Kindly avoid comments such as these in future publications," his instruction is more relevant than ever.

In a conversation in Vrindavana, Srila Prabhupada was very upset. He heavily criticized some BBT editors for mistakes they made and for whimsically changing the text. Some of his scathing comments: "What can be done if it goes there and these rascals become Sanskrit scholar and do everything nonsense? . . . It is very risky to give to them for editorial direction . . . Immediately they become very big scholars, high salaried, and write all nonsense . . . These rascals cannot be educated . . . The leader of these dangerous . . . He'll always have questions and alteration . . . These rascal editorial . . . has changed so many things . . . You write one letter that, 'Why you have made so many changes?'" At one point a devotee points out another change - apparently to highlight another mistake - but this time, because the change was meant to prevent agitating the public, Srila Prabhupada defends it:

Śatadhanya: Rāmeśvara . . . had mentioned that in one article you had denounced the Christians strongly, so he said he left one part out because he was afraid there would be a bad reaction from the Christians in America. So that kind of decision...
Prabhupāda: That is possible. That is possible. He should be careful.
(Conversation, Vrindavana, 22 June 1977)

You can read and listen to the whole exchange on vanipedia.org.[112] Although very angry with some of the changes in Sanskrit translations and other unnecessary adjustments, Srila Prabhupada makes allowance for editing aiming at avoiding unwarranted criticism and disturbance. What can we learn from these lessons?

Perhaps You Should Try... Forgiveness?

What I am going to say now it's highly atypical, and it's a personal message to those Vaisnavis and Vaisnavas who harbor resentment for some of what Srila Prabhupada

[112] https://vanisource.org/wiki/770622_-_Conversation_-_Vrndavana

said. If you still feel embittered (due to something he said about race, gender, sexual orientation or whatever), and still think that what he said was unfair, unnecessary, or mistaken, you should consider just *forgiving* him.

In normal circumstances, we wouldn't even contemplate the notion of forgiveness toward a great devotee; especially someone who underwent so many austerities, made so many sacrifices and endeavored so much to bring Krishna to us - and us to Krishna. Generally, the natural or "recommended sentiment" would be one of deep gratitude, appreciating the many priceless gifts and blessings he brought to us. But if you are still seriously affected by some of his "controversial statements," I wish you can find some closure, some resolution or at least some mitigation of your emotional pain; and you can try to just forgive him for causing whatever pain you are experiencing. Even if the sentences that hurt you could be rationally justified, you might still feel wounded. Please, find the strength in your heart to excuse and absolve him for whatever pain his words caused you. That's my recommendation - alongside a humble, friendly reminder that you, the eternal self, have no intrinsic or lasting connection with your present body,

your present race, your present gender or your present sexual orientation.

Christianity, Islam, ISKCON and Everyone Else - Same Need for Maxims

In this world of impermanence, we all crave cognitive stability, the comfort of believing that what we know is true, fixed and unchangeable. To manage our beliefs, we simplify their intricacies and turn them into "sacred memes." These "creed capsules" perpetuate ideas and symbols within a culture. They also cement the communal identity. Take for instance what may constitute the apex of religious parochialism: Christians at one point started branding Jesus as God's only begotten son. The idea sprang from the pen of an anonymous Greek-speaking author writing (probably) in the late first century CE (or later); an unknown individual now conventionally referred to as "John." The authors of the other three canonical gospels never mention that Jesus was the *only* Son of God. Even "John" never claims that Jesus declared himself as such. But, hey, what a marketing tool!

What an advantage on the competition! "Prophets, seers, sages, oracles, hermits and other ascetics might be fine, but we have the genuine and *exclusive* article: the sole and only... Son of God!" It might be baffling for the outsider to fathom why the Supreme Person - ostensibly an unlimited, infinite Being - should limit Himself so drastically in his reproductive functions. One would expect an unlimited Being to be more... fecund. But we are not dealing with logic or solid theology here. We are dealing with a fledgling and endangered faith community jostling for survival and distinction in the overcrowded Mediterranean and middle eastern religious market. More than two-hundred years later, in 325, with Christianity on more solid social ground, Emperor Constantine and the hundreds of bishops he had invited to the First Council of Nicaea (in modern-day Turkey), enshrined John's dogma front and center in the creed they scripted: "Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the only-begotten of his Father..." The rest is history (and communalism) (and politics) (and sectarianism) (and persecution of the "unbelievers"). An article of the *Encyclopedia Britannica* explains: "Christianity, from its beginning, has tended toward an intolerance that was rooted in the understanding of itself as revelation of the divine truth that became human in

Jesus Christ himself. 'I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but by me' (John 14:6). To be a Christian is to 'follow the truth' (3 John); the Christian proclamation is 'the way of truth' (2 Peter 2:2). Those who do not acknowledge the truth are enemies 'of the cross of Christ' (Philippians 3:18) who have 'exchanged the truth about God for a lie' (Romans 1:25) and made themselves the advocates and confederates of the 'adversary, the devil,' who 'prowls around like a roaring lion' (1 Peter 5:8). Thus, one cannot make a deal with the Devil and his party—and in this lies the basis for parochialism in Christianity."[113] It's a very short step from a sense of entitlement and exclusivity to rejecting and tyrannizing others - all based on condensed credos.

We use religious slogans as "awareness filters," conceptual pointers to navigate the complexities of reality and to feel secure in fluctuating circumstances. These succinct adages become the anchors of our cultural and religious identity; they provide handy signposts within the puzzling vastness of the cosmos. Although theological in style and aspiring to convey all-

[113] https://www.britannica.com/topic/Christianity/Authority-and-dissent

encompassing concepts, these "pills of reality" latch into historical phenomena, striving to elevate them to timeless truths. And so, for instance, we have the *shahada*, or Islamic declaration of faith, as featured on the flag of Saudi Arabia: "There is no god but Allah; Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah." We can agree that the Supreme Being is one (in His multifarious manifestations). We can also agree that Muhammad has been powerfully instrumental to establish a brand of monotheistic God consciousness in a place previously mired in superstitious worship of various gods and goddesses. Srila Prabhupada did refer to Mohammed as an empowered being: "Lord Mohammed is accepted by us as Saktyavesa Avatar." (Letter to Surasrestha, 14 June 1972) Nonetheless, God, the Eternal Being and Father of the Universes, did employ other messengers before and after the beginning of the 7th century C.E., and therefore the statement on the Saudi flag, particularly the part about Mohammed, should be taken as holy and accurate but circumscribed within time and space. Compare the *Bhagavatam* vision of endless divine manifestations: "O *brāhmaṇas*, the incarnations of the Lord are innumerable, like rivulets flowing from inexhaustible sources of water." (SB 1.3.26) But the material mind can hardly hold and

process "innumerable" divine descents, interminable appearances of God Himself and of His emissaries. Where do we start? Where do we end? Where do we "put" all of them in the 1400 grams of our brain? And so we select. We elect a specific manifestation close to us as the highest, as incomparable and unprecedented - although nothing is truly *unprecedented* in cyclical time. Contemporary ISKCON followers might unconsciously synthetize their religious worldview into "Sri Krishna is the Supreme Personality of Godhead; Srila Prabhupada is His representative." This maxim hasn't yet crystallized into a formal slogan, but it does appear as to float in many ISKCON devotees' mind - with occasional overt verbalizations. And there is nothing wrong with it - but we need to understand that the part about Srila Prabhupada being God's representative is an historical occurrence, not a perennial axiom. This or similarly structured affirmations from other traditions should be taken as adequate within the relative, restrictive parameters of times, places and cultural contexts, but reveal themselves peripherical and provincial if we attempt to impose them on eternal time. Before being forgotten in the inevitable, unstoppable cycle of passing ages, such mottoes may raise to the rank of canonical truths and

ecclesiastical credos. We, a mediocre species, seek personal and collective validation in such see-through pennants of insecurity, in such philosophical fig leaves. Such simplified and simplistic formula may lock themselves within the conscious and subconscious mind of religious communities, eventually swelling to the status of sacrosanct tenets and unassailable dogmas. Relativizing them automatically unleashes allegations of heresy and the wrath of self-appointed censors. The devoted but gullible get worked up into a mob when their cherished mental models are challenged by broader conceptions. Those who might not feel spontaneously inclined to adopt such aphorisms as their emotional compass - but wish to remain in the fold - silently bear the fervor of the "true believers," thus avoiding "detection and capture." Impervious to the dangers of sclerotization and extremism, blind to the risk of radicalism and fanaticism, such jingoistic approaches, although largely tribalistic, appear sorely needed by the human psyche. Minimalistic maxims make things plain. They also consolidate the sense of identity of individuals and groups around simple, shareable thought-globules. They provide an accessible, pocket-sized social yardstick for doctrinal purity. They gratify the psychological need for exceptionalism and supremacism. They buttress the

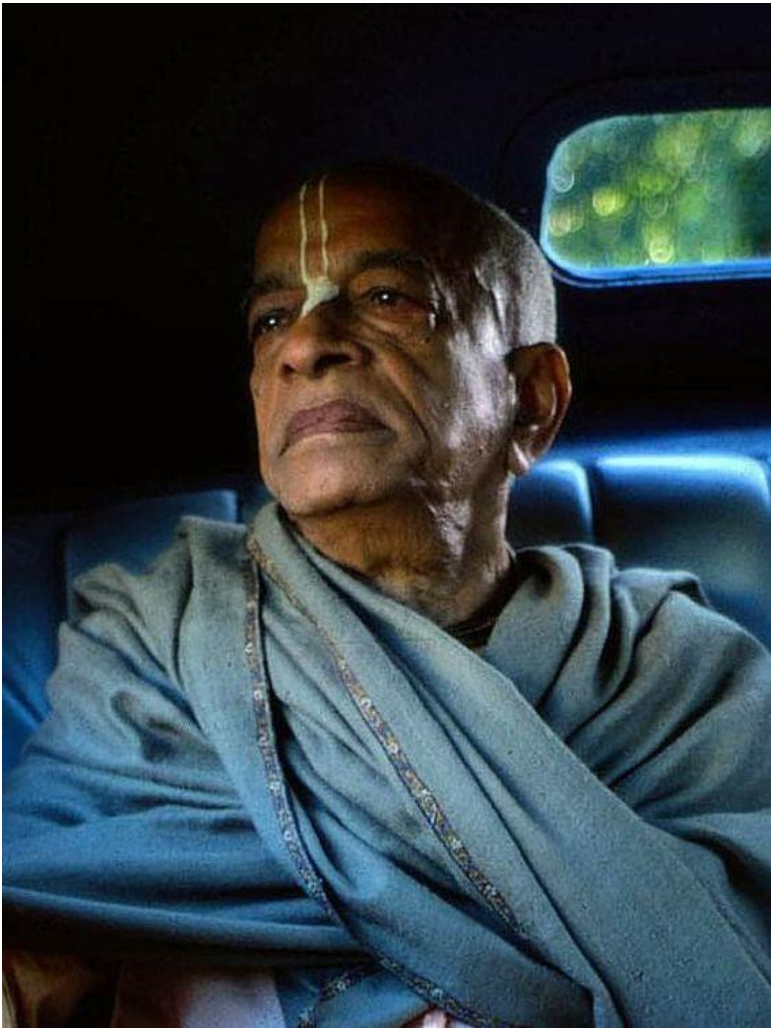
communal desire for uniqueness. (If what we believe isn't the best faith; if what we practice isn't the highest path; if our spiritual preceptor isn't the greatest; why should we believe, practice, and follow our particular lineage? What would happen to our enthusiasm if our reference points were revealed as less than incomparable?) Our ego demands exclusivism. Our rudimentary minds require simple sayings.

"But," someone may ask, "what about a formula such as *acintya-bhedabheda-tattva*? Isn't such a construct simple, short and accurate at the same time?"

"Ah!" I would reply, "*short*; yes; but *simple?!* How can the *acintya* - the inconceivable - be *simple?"* This is when intellectual tension and sacred paradox come to life. The divine dimension is, by definition, beyond the grasp of the lump of grey matter packed in the skull. The mystical dynamics of Transcendence remain unreachable by the neural network buzzing between the ears. The attempts at trapping the Absolute and the sequence of His earthly *lilas* within diminutive catchphrases reveal more about human limitations than about the unbounded workings of the Eternal Living Truth. But - notwithstanding - the Absolute,

being absolute, although not fully expressible by gazillions of portrayals, can manifest in His fullness within a single syllable. On one hand, "It is stated that Ananta, an incarnation of the Lord who has unlimited mouths, cannot reach the end of His glorification of the Lord, although Ananta has been describing the Lord since time immemorial." (SB 4.16.2, purport) On the other hand, the linguistically minuscule *praṇava oṁkāra* - the sacred syllable *oṁ* - perfectly and completely encapsulates all planes and interplays of Reality: "*oṁkāra,* or *praṇava*, is a direct representation of the Supreme Personality of Godhead . . . On the basis of all the *Upaniṣads*, Śrīla Jīva Gosvāmī says that *oṁkāra* is the Supreme Absolute Truth and is accepted as such by all the *ācāryas* and authorities . . . *Oṁkāra* is the origin, middle and end of everything." (*Cc Adi-lila*, 7.128, purport) Therefore shorthand characterizations have their place in religious life in general and Vaisnavism in particular, but we should not myopically absorb in our cherished denomination and lose touch with the larger picture. Within this framework, it is perfectly praiseworthy to feel and profess an intense allegiance to Srila Prabhuada, a strong sense of connection and identity with his movement, and a desire to be with him forever. While Srila Prabhupada's historical earthly

presence (1896-1977) might be meteoritical - the proverbial blink in cosmic time - we accept him, over and above his circumstantial physical embodiment, as an eternal being, a permanent spiritual person possessing a perpetual *sat-cit-ananda* identity in the divine realm of Goloka Vrindavana, happily and everlastingly living with Krishna and His associates. There he won't appear as the Bengali holy man we are accustomed to. In that dimension beyond material time and space, his form, his voice, and his role shall be different; but he will be the same self, and those who dedicated their lives to his service and mission will live perpetually with him; his controversial statements about race, sex and sexual orientation finally erased from memory and long forgotten.



Appendix One - ISKCON's Statement on Race

Without prejudice - by ISKCON's Governing Body Commission

1 September 2021

In this time of global strife, tension, and polarization, the insights expressed in the *Bhagavad-gita*, a timeless wisdom text, irrevocably establish the spiritual equality of all beings. Such equality fosters tolerance, understanding, deep compassion, and unity in diversity. Moreover, *Sri Isopanisad* says, "He who systematically sees everything in relation to the Supreme Lord, who sees all living entities as His parts and parcels, and who sees the Supreme Lord within everything never hates anything or any being." In this way, all living beings are souls, children of God, brothers and sisters in God's all-embracing family.

In the Gaudiya Vaishnava tradition, of which the International Society for Krishna Consciousness

(ISKCON) is a present-day branch, inclusiveness has been taught by generations of teachers, including Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu (1486-1534), the pioneer of a great social and religious movement that began five centuries ago in India. Despite forceful opposition, Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu, who is understood by the tradition to be Lord Krishna (God) Himself, opened his movement to everyone.

In turn, His Divine Grace A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, (1896–1977), ISKCON'S founder-acharya, travelled the world to establish ISKCON and spread the message of *bhakti*, or unconditional love of God, and to teach that spiritually we are all equal. Hence, Sri Caitanya's vision of equality and inclusiveness underpins ISKCON's worldview.

Srila Prabhupada tirelessly proclaimed the physical body to be like an outward dress and the spirit soul to be the real person. He taught that material differences were external and superficial. What matters is the person, not the dress — the soul, not the body. On the spiritual plane of the soul, equality is true and absolute. In this way, his teachings pivoted on spirit, not matter. They went far beyond the considerations of body, mind, intellect, and

false ego to culminate in pure devotion and service to God, which only begins in earnest when our sense of who we are is firmly removed from any bodily, psychological, or intellectual designation.

Through his prolific writings, lectures, and organizational designs, Srila Prabhupada tirelessly endeavored to assist everyone in rekindling this vision and their natural love and in refining the kindness, integrity, and happiness that ensue. He placed love and compassion at the center of his personal dealings, and he exemplified these divine qualities in the way he inspired and directed the communities and organizations he founded. He taught that traits such as sex, race, and social class are ultimately irrelevant. His efforts were heroic; his accomplishments profound.

Clearly, such a sublime, spiritual vision warmly embraces all communities and races. Indeed, ISKCON, or the Hare Krishna movement, is committed to this vision and therefore invites everyone to participate and share fellowship in service to God, take responsibility, and hold positions of spiritual leadership.

Thus, the Hare Krishna movement stands against any form of racial bigotry and discrimination and condemns any behavior that is derogatory, demeaning, and racially insensitive. Instead, it encourages racial harmony and spiritual equality, as did Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu and Srila Prabhupada. We are committed to creating an environment in which everyone feels valued and is educated to manifest a culture of universal peace, understanding, respect, tolerance, friendliness, and forgiveness. Furthermore, we remain committed to intervening, wherever and whenever necessary within ISKCON, to stop any wrongdoing that opposes such values.

Let us all acknowledge our shared spirituality, transcend racial differences and divides, and together live up to aspirations worthy of our ultimate connectedness with every living being, and with God.

Appendix Two - ISKCON South Africa Stands Against Racism and Discrimination

By Bhakti Caitanya Swami Co-GBC ISKCON South Africa, Govardhana Dasa Co-GBC ISKCON South Africa, Jun 14, 2020[114]

South Africa has a painful history. So many people have suffered transgressions, so many have endured racial policies based on discrimination and deliberate marginalization. This history and its ongoing ramifications should never be trivialized, and any callousness should be met with a concerted effort to deepen our collective understanding of past and present pain.

Human dignity is the bedrock of our country's constitution, which enshrines equality, human rights, freedom, non-racialism, and non-sexism. Those very same

[114] https://iskconnews.org/iskcon-south-africa-stands-against-racism-and-discrimination/

principles are also expressed in the constitution of ISKCON's South African National Council (SANC), and each and every SANC member is committed to fully realizing those principles.

The *Bhagavad-gita* teaches that as eternal, infinitesimal spiritual beings, we are all equal as brothers and sisters, with Krishna as our common father. All of us must strive to fully assimilate this core teaching, and we must all recognize that example is more important than precept. Let us be cautious not to mistake our *own* perceived reality as *everyone's* reality, and let us always observe true Vaishnava decorum and compassion, no matter what.

Tenderness of the heart for Krishna is known as *bhakti*. Developing *bhakti* for Krishna goes hand in hand with loving, serving, and appreciating all His devotees — one cannot develop *bhakti* otherwise. If we do not take the time to understand the painful experiences of our brothers and sisters, we cannot suitably appreciate them, let alone support and serve them. Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakura writes that compassion is a natural human sentiment, which finds its highest expression in the works of the Lord's devotees.

When Krishna consciousness is practiced in an authentic way, a spiritual society replete with saintly virtues will naturally manifest. But for this to happen, each and every one of us must strive to be exemplars of Vaishnava culture, values, and behaviour — at all times, in all circumstances, without exception. Quality of character and purity of heart are the true measures of anyone's spiritual progress. Thus, our Vaishnava *sadacara* (proper behaviour) cannot be separated from Sri Krishna's philosophical teachings in *Bhagavad-gita*.

ISKCON's leaders in South Africa recognise that they must do better in this regard. Despite our efforts, we have not adequately ensured that ISKCON's principles and purposes are manifest in the experience of many sincere people who have accepted the shelter of Srila Prabhupada's movement. For this we sincerely apologise. We particularly apologise for biases experienced by black African devotees, especially if such biases have gone on uncorrected. As leaders, it is our responsibility to ensure that everyone feels valued, cared for, and included. Therefore, we reconfirm our commitment to develop Srila Prabhupada's movement according to the standards he

desired to truly make it a house in which the whole world can live.

Over the coming months, all ISKCON's leaders in South Africa will undertake formal training on diversity, inclusion, and unconscious bias to better identify personal and institutional shortcomings and take appropriate corrective action. We are committed to furthering the spiritual advancement of *all* our members (including first and second initiation, as per established guidelines based exclusively on spiritual standing and practice).

Open-hearted dialogue on these matters is vital. ISKCON South Africa will, therefore, launch a series of online conversations centred around ISKCON South Africa's values to discuss diverse perspectives in the realisation of these values for everyone's benefit.

We also recognise the pressing need for an independent body to adjudicate on matters pertaining to bias and discrimination. And looking further ahead, we are eager for the establishment of a Leadership Centre, which will provide a facility for the secular and spiritual training of future African leaders.

South Africa's diverse ethnic, cultural, and religious background offers all of us a unique opportunity to reveal the genuine efficacy and universal relevance of Krishna consciousness. United with a common desire for spiritual growth and purpose, and dedicating all our activities to Sri Krishna, let us attract countless people to joyously experience spiritual life.

ISKCON South Africa's leaders are ready to be courageous and to listen. With your support, we can realize Srila Prabhupada's vision for ISKCON together. Thus, we pray that we may serve all devotees better, with greater empathy and connection. And, in the end, may we all please Srila Prabhupada and obtain the grace of Lord Sri Krishna.

Appendix Three - A Case of Loss of Faith

Some people reject Srila Prabhupada's teachings (and reject him as a qualified spiritual guide) due to instinctive, inherent dislike. For others rejection exhibits as painful rethinking. Alex DiBlasi, who at one point even took initiation in ISKCON, published the article "Spitting Out Poison" on medium.com, a leading blogging platform. I am not going to pinpoint historical inaccuracies that might have slipped in his portrayal. What interests me here is the devasting emotional and intellectual impact that certain comments by Srila Prabhupada can have: "[T]his writer has found an unabashed instance advocating for one of the ugliest forms of discrimination (in its damnable modern context) from a source once held very dear: Abhay Charan Day, known to the world as A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, founder of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON). What I read were words in support of the enslavement of Africans living in the United States, criticizing the Civil Rights Movement and efforts towards Black liberation . . . '*in America, the*

blacks were slaves, were under control, and since you have given them equal rights, they are disturbed, most disturbed, always creating a fearful situation, uncultured, and drunkards. What training they have got? They have got equal rights. They are best to keep them under control as slaves. But, give them sufficient food, sufficient clothes, not more than that. Then they will be controlled.' [Conversation, Mayapur, 14 Feb 1977] . . . This was not an easy discovery to digest. Its unquestionable authenticity — there's audio — spared me the mental gymnastics of doubt that typically accompany this strong a degree of shock. I felt a surge of hurt and despair. My stomach turned inside out. I sat aghast for several minutes. How could someone who I thought preached equality and egalitarianism hold such a low opinion of Black people, and how could he call himself a man of God while also championing slavery? . . . Nowhere does Prabhupada place blame on those who enacted and engaged in the Transatlantic slave trade, nowhere does he respect the struggle for Black liberation from state oppression and their recent successes . . . and *nowhere* does he criticize the European Christian colonialism that made possible this unholy episode in history. The ignorance and insensitivity in his comments betray the 'His Divine Grace' moniker

that precedes his name . . . Prabhupada was not just saying this in error, but *in sin*. The Bhagavad Gita teaches that our true selves are not our bodies, but instead soul entities, which if anything is a powerful statement against racism, sexism, and the caste system. As a trained swami from a disciplic lineage that goes back to the 16th Century, Prabhupada, frankly, knew better. The whole acceptance of his words as infallible by his devotees and disciples is equally damnable."[115]

In the section entitled "Condoning & Promoting Slavery?! Actually Not" I addressed in detail the conversation containing the sentence "best to keep them under control as slaves." I already explained, for instance, that the outburst was due to Srila Prabhupada's frustration with a system that declares people free without offering the tools for true freedom; and so I won't belabor the points I made there. Most people don't have the time or the interest to delve into the subtleties of the original exchange. They won't search for other "balancing statements" such as, "In your country the Negroes were slaves, but fortunately they have been made free." (Hawaii, 10 March 1969) No, for

[115] https://alexdiblasi.medium.com/spitting-out-poison-d39e2485d53e

them a sentence such as "best to keep them under control as slaves" is enough for a complete and unappealable condemnation.

Alex DiBlasi then directly urged the GBC to do something: "As one of the most visible Hindu organizations in the world, the Governing Body Commission (GBC) of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON) must address these racist statements and condemn them . . . I urge the global faith community, civil rights groups, and activists to join me in this call to the GBC." I find his exhortation to the GBC intriguing; Alex doesn't wish to destroy ISKCON, to wipe it out from the face of the earth; he wishes ISKCON to untangle itself from unquestioned allegiance to *everything* Srila Prabhupada ever said. Alex's way of expressing his feelings might be piercing and should certainly be considered as transgressing proper Vaisnava etiquette, but I do agree with the message, which I paraphrase as "ISKCON, distance yourself from certain statements!" Alex keeps sharing on how finding such statements affected him, as a person and as a practicing devotee: "Before I finish, I must address this discovery on a personal level. My response is decisive and immediate: I reject Bhaktivedanta Swami

Prabhupada as my personal guru. I renounce my initiation into the Gaudiya Vaisnava order." And racism isn't his only complaint: "Prabhupada has also made problematic statements suggesting women are of intellectual and spiritual inferiority in comparison to their male counterparts . . . Prabhupada must be dethroned as a spiritual leader holding any degree of infallibility . . . The Hindu world will benefit from shedding association with ISKCON's present existence as a rudderless ship, while also calling into question the legitimacy of Prabhupada, his true mission, and dismantling his legacy."

These are strong denunciations, of Srila Prabhupada and of the whole International Society for Krishna Consciousness. We might recoil in instinctive dismissal or denial. Our knee-jerk reaction may be trying to exorcise Alex's words by psychoanalyzing him: "Just see! He was attached to sense gratification and mundane 'freedom' and so he took these controversial statements as a pretext to stop undergoing the rigors of serious *bhakti-yoga*. He wasn't sincere, that's all!" Or we might tend to rationalize: "He is not considering how kind and encouraging Srila Prabhupada was to Blacks, women and gays." Such considerations may have some degree of validity; but right

now they are completely beside the point: Srila Prabhupada did say things that, at least for contemporary sensitivities, appear indefensible. Certain statements, especially when quoted out of context, repel modern audiences. The quicker we accept this fact, the quicker we can act on it, and the quicker we can grow in maturity as a movement. And the quicker we can develop an ISKCON Srila Prabhupada would be proud of.

Appendix Four - Reaffirming Vaishnava Respect for Women

In 2008, iskconnews.org, "The News Agency of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness," published the following (it includes two appendixes): [116]

GBC Statement Reaffirms Vaishnava Respect for Women

By: The GBC Executive Committee on May 29, 2008

Today we live in a world that is full of war, strife, hatred and exploitation between people. It is a world based on a bodily conception of life that categorizes and then mistreats living beings on the basis of race, gender, national origin, religion, etc.

The Krishna consciousness movement teaches a higher guiding principle based upon the soul. We offer to the

[116] https://iskconnews.org/gbc-statement-reaffirms-vaishnava-respect-for-women/

world a panacea: We can live together peacefully only when we respect each other as individual spiritual beings, part and parcel of God. All living beings are eternal, all are sacred, and all--in their essence--are equally dear to the Supreme Lord.

To effectively teach this principle, members of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness need to be vigilant that it be properly understood and practiced within our own society and among our members. We must believe in the principle of loving, respecting, and caring for all beings as parts and parcels of Lord Krishna.

It is our sacred duty to teach, speak, and live the principles of humility and respect for all, as taught by Lord Caitanya and our Founder-Acarya, Srila Prabhupada. We must also speak out against deviations from those principles.

In 1998, the North American GBC/Temple Presidents Executive Committee found it necessary to speak out against an email conference that claimed to be founded on Vaishnava teachings that was belittling and demeaning to women.

It minimized the contributions of women, and failed to fully appreciate the role women play in our society, our families, and our temples. (See Appendix 1 below.)

Today, the International GBC Executive Committee is disturbed to learn that a blog site claiming affiliation with ISKCON, and using "Hare Krishna" in its name, has included sexist and misogynist statements. Such writings are not authorized, and they are against the principles of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness and our Vaishnava culture.

We condemn any effort to minimize the contributions and importance of women in our society. Instead, we offer the women of our society the highest respect. Women are of great value to our Vaishnava community, and have made immeasurable, indispensable, and saintly contributions as mothers, daughters, wives, pujaris, priests, teachers, and leaders.

We call upon all members of ISKCON to be living examples of the highest respect and appreciation for all living beings and to resist any temptations towards

disrespect or prejudice.

Your servants,

The GBC Executive Committee

Appendix 1 - 1998 Statement by the North American Executive Officers

The North American GBC/Temple President Executive Officers wish to voice our strong disapproval of, and our protest against, the demeaning and ill intended statements made by some members of the GHQ com conference that were recently brought to public attention.

It is our firm position that Srila Prabhupada, the Founder-Acarya of ISKCON, intended his Hare Krishna Movement to be free from all prejudice, sexism, racism and other forms of bigotry.

We affirm that the first and foremost principle of our society is that all people (indeed all sentient beings) are eternal, sacred parts and parcels of the Supreme Lord Sri

Krishna, and as such should be respected and affirmed in their individual relationship with the Lord, as well as their service to guru and Krishna.

Multiple statements made by members of this Internet conference ridicule, berate and vilify women, other minorities, and individual Vaishnava devotees. They document an organized attempt to prevent women from their God-given rights of self-expression and service to Srila Prabhupada. We denounce such views. They are opposed to the core values and principles of Vaishnava culture which upholds the devotional offerings of all souls as sacred and worthy of our respect and protection.

While we endorse open debate and dialogue within our Krishna Consciousness movement, we must speak out against any discussion that crosses the line of decency, morality, and Vaishnava etiquette and supports an agenda to exploit or minimize a section of our society.

Bir Krishna Goswami, Chairperson
Anuttama Dasa
Sudharma Dasi
Vraja Lila Dasi

Appendix 2 - Women in ISKCON - International GBC Resolution March 2000

WHEREAS, the Women's Ministry presentation on March 1st, 2000 to the GBC Body brought a clearer understanding of the mistakes of the past and the need to provide equal and full opportunity for devotional service for all devotees in ISKCON, regardless of gender, and

WHEREAS, it is clearly following in our line that all people are welcome to join Lord Caitanya's sankirtana movement and are capable of developing full love of God, and

WHEREAS, it is our belief that many of the social issues that confront us are exacerbated because the voice of our women, who are the mothers and daughters of our Krsna conscious family, have been hushed and stifled due to misinterpretation of our Vaisnava philosophy, and thus the human and interpersonal needs of our devotees have been minimized,

THEREFORE IT IS RESOLVED THAT:

501 [STATEMENT] 1. The members of the Governing Body Commission of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness offer their humble apologies to the women of Srila Prabhupada's society who, because of our own shortcomings and those of the Society, have suffered due to a lack of protection, support, facility and appreciation for their service, devotion and vast contributions to the Society, and

2. [ACTION] All GBC Body members and other leaders shall hold *istagosthis* [meetings] in each of their respective temples to establish the priority of providing equal facilities, full encouragement and genuine care and protection for the women members of ISKCON. Also, separate meetings should be held with the leaders and women of each temple to address the women's needs and concerns,

Women's Participation 19 [LAW]

A. All ISKCON temples are to allow all qualified devotees, regardless of gender, to speak on *Srimad-Bhagavatam*, *Bhagavad-gita*, etc. during the regular temple class.

B. All ISKCON temples designate half of the temple room area, divided in the center from the altar, for the ladies.

C. If the management in a particular temple feels it is unable to implement these proposals, the Executive Committee will appoint a small team of senior devotees, including women, to sensitively review the particular local situation.

Appendix Five - The Venerable Tradition of ISKCON Literalism

An early example from *Śrīla Prabhupāda-līlāmṛta*, Chapter 19 - New York, September 1966.

Larry Bogart, who worked at the United Nations Headquarters, had become friends with the Swami . . . Mr. Bogart was phoning to offer his appreciation and agreeing to visit the storefront. He wanted to help, and he would discuss how the Swami could work with the U.N. and how he could solicit help from important people for his movement of Indian culture and peace.

Prabhupāda regarded Mr. Bogart's imminent visit as very important, and he wanted to cook for him personally and receive him in his apartment with the best hospitality. When the day arrived, Prabhupāda and Keith cooked together in the small kitchen for several hours, making the

best Indian delicacies. Prabhupāda posted Stanley downstairs and told him not to allow anyone to come up while he was cooking the feast for Mr. Bogart. Stanley assented, blinking his eyes with his far-off "saintly" look.

Stanley stationed himself downstairs in the storefront. A few of the boys were there, and he told them, "You can't go up to see the Swami – no one can." About twelve noon, Larry Bogart arrived, pale, elderly, and well dressed, by Lower East Side standards. He said he wanted to see Swami Bhaktivedanta. "Sorry," Stanley informed him, his boyish face trying to impress the stranger with the seriousness of the order, "the Swami is busy now, and he said no one can see him." Mr. Bogart decided he would wait. There was no chair in the storefront, but Stanley brought him a folding chair. It was a hot day. Mr. Bogart looked at his watch several times. A half hour passed. Stanley sat chanting and sometimes staring off blankly. After an hour, Mr. Bogart asked if he could see the Swami now. Stanley assured him that he could not, and Mr. Bogart left in a huff.

Upstairs, Swamiji had become anxious, wondering why Mr. Bogart had not arrived. Finally, he sent Keith

downstairs, and Stanley told him about the man whom he had turned away. “What?” Keith exploded. “But that was …” Within moments, Swamiji heard what had happened. He became furious. He came down to the storefront: “You fool! You silly fool!” He turned and angrily rebuked everyone in the room, but mostly Stanley. No one had ever seen the Swami so angry. Then Swamiji walked away in disgust and returned to his apartment.

About the Author

Kaunteya das (Dr. Carlo Oppecini, PhD, Indovedic Psychology) joined ISKCON in 1980. At present he serves as: co-minister of the *ISKCON Congregational Development Ministry* (with Jayapataka Swami, his *diksa-guru*); as trustee and faculty member of the *GBC College for Leadership Development*; as co-chair of the *GBC Organizational Development Committee*; as member of the *GBC Strategic Planning Team*; as member of the *GBC Nominations Committee*; as member of the board of directors of the *Back to Godhead* magazine; and as *Special Duty Officer* for ISKCON Brazil. He lives in Sridham Mayapur, India, with his wife, Sri Radha Govinda Dasi.

This book is for: 1. devotees affected by Srila Prabhupada's words on race, homosexuality, and gender; 2. ISKCON leaders that must deal with the fallout from those statements.

♦

"This book will provide . . . an invaluable resource of information, quotations, and analysis. Hopefully this will foster learned, well-informed discussion of a very important topic."

Hridayananda das Goswami

"Kaunteya's work is grounded on extensive research. Even devotees familiar with the topics he highlights - Prabhupada's occasional comments about women, Blacks, Native Americans, Jews, Hitler, homosexuality, and more - will find references . . . that are new, and likely more nuanced, than they previously considered . . . This book does not gloss over what is uncomfortable."

Anuttama Das, ISKCON Minister for Communications

"Carefully avoiding the slippery ideological position, Kaunteya das tackles the difficult topic of Srila Prabhupada's controversial statements in an objective and transparent way."

Parabhakti Dasa, Communications Director, ISKCON Italy